Table of Contents

1. Allegiances
2. Prologue
3. Chapter One
4. Chapter Two
5. Chapter Three
6. Chapter Four
7. Chapter Five
8. Chapter Six
9. Chapter Seven
10. Chapter Eight
11. Chapter Nine
12. Chapter Ten
13. Chapter Eleven
14. Chapter Twelve
15. Chapter Thirteen
16. Chapter Fourteen
17. Chapter Fifteen
18. Chapter Sixteen
19. Chapter Seventeen
20. Chapter Eighteen
21. Chapter Nineteen
22. Chapter Twenty
23. Chapter Twenty One

Allegiances

THUNDERCLAN

Leader: Bluestar—blue-gray she-cat, tinged with silver around her muzzle

Deputy: Fireheart—handsome ginger tom

Apprentice, Cloudpaw

Medicine cats: Yellowfang—old dark gray she-cat with a broad, flattened face, formerly of ShadowClan

Apprentice, Waterlily—a pretty long-haired, calico she-cat with bright amber eyes

Warriors: Whitestorm—big white tom

Apprentice, Brightpaw

Darkstripe—sleek black-and-gray tabby tom

Apprentice, Fernpaw

Longtail—pale tabby tom with dark black stripes

Apprentice, Swiftpaw

Runningwind—swift tabby tom

Mousefur—small dusky-brown she-cat

Apprentice, Thornpaw

Brackenfur—golden-brown tabby tom

Dustpelt—dark brown tabby tom

Apprentice, Ashpaw

Sandstorm—pale ginger she-cat

Cinderpelt—small and sleek-furred, smokey-dark gray she-cat

Apprentices: Swiftpaw—black-and-white tom

Cloudpaw—long-haired white tom

Brightpaw—she-cat, white with ginger splotches

Thornpaw—golden-brown tabby tom

Fernpaw—pale gray with darker flecks, she-cat, pale green eyes

Ashpaw—pale gray with darker flecks, tom, dark blue eyes

Queens: Frostfur—beautiful white coat and blue eyes

Brindleface—pretty tabby

Goldenflower—pale ginger coat

Speckletail—pale tabby, and the oldest nursery queen

Willowpelt—very pale gray she-cat with unusual blue eyes

Elders: Halftail—big dark brown tabby tom with part of his tail missing

Smallear—gray tom with very small ears; the oldest tom in ThunderClan

Patchpelt—small black-and-white tom

One-eye—pale gray she-cat, the oldest she-cat in ThunderClan; virtually blind and deaf

Dappletail—once-pretty tortoiseshell she-cat with a lovely dappled coat

SHADOWCLAN

Leader: Nightstar—old black tom

Deputy: Cinderfur—thin gray tom

Medicine cats: Runningnose—small gray-and-white tom

Warriors: Stumpytail—brown tabby tom

Apprentice, Brownpaw

Wetfoot—gray tabby tom

Apprentice, Oakpaw

Littlecloud—very small tabby tom

Whitethroat—black tom with white chest and paws

Queens: Dawncloud—small tabby

Darkflower—black she-cat

Tallpoppy—long-legged light brown tabby she-cat

WINDCLAN

Leader: Tallstar—black-and-white tom with a very long tail

Deputy: Deadfoot—black tom with a twisted paw

Medicine cats: Barkface—short-tailed brown tom

Warriors: Mudclaw—mottled dark brown tom

Apprentice, Webpaw

Tornear—tabby tom

Apprentice, Tawnypaw

Onewhisker—brown tabby tom

Apprentice, Whitepaw

Runningbrook—light gray tabby she-cat

Queens: Ashfoot—gray queen

Morningflower—tortoiseshell queen

RIVERCLAN

Leader: Crookedstar—huge light-colored tabby with a twisted jaw

Deputy: Leopardfur—unusually spotted golden tabby she-cat

Medicine cats: Mudfur—long-haired light brown tom

Warriors: Blackclaw—smoky black tom

Apprentice, Heavypaw

Stonefur—gray tom with battle-scarred ears

Apprentice, Shadepaw

Loudbelly—dark brown tom

Graystripe—long-haired gray tom, formerly of ThunderClan

Queens: Mistyfoot—dark gray she-cat

Mosspelt—tortoiseshell she-cat

Elders: Graypool—thin gray she-cat with patchy fur and a scarred muzzle

CATS OUTSIDE THE CLANS

Blackfoot—large white tom with huge jet-black paws, formerly ShadowClan deputy

Boulder—silver tabby tom, formerly of ShadowClan

Tigerclaw—big dark brown tabby tom with unusually long front claws, formerly of ThunderClan

Prologue

Waterlily scrambled down the tunnel leading to the Moonstone. It was leaf-bare and the tunnel almost made her slide all the way down. Yellowfang was just behind her and padded much slower, keeping herself steady.

Waterlily waited for the other medicine cats to settle down and touch their noses to the stone. She then did the same and closed her eyes. Starlight swirled around her and she blinked open her eyes. She was standing on top of a large, rocky wall. Was she in StarClan? She searched the clearing beneath her. A large pool of water laid in the middle and she could see tiny specks of stars twinkling around the pool.

She scanned the rocky wall for a way down, but found nothing. She thought of jumping, but knew it would only lead to serious injuries, even if she was in the paws of StarClan.

"Waterlily." Meowed a familiar voice behind her.

"Featherwhisker." She purred, turning around. She greeted him with a slight nod then looked back at the pool of water.

"Come, I know a way down." He mewed, flicking his tail. She followed him down a narrow slope behind her from where she was standing. The rocks formed almost a bridge for them to climb down. She had to jump from rock to rock. Featherwhisker made it look so easy.

As they neared the bottom, he veered around the corner and followed another path leading them around the huge mountain of rocks. It was much clearer and sandier when her paws hit the path. She could now clearly see the cats that had sat near the rippling pool of water.

"Cloudberry." He mewed, as they neared the crowd of cats.

Waterlily remembered the faint smell of the former medicine cat of ThunderClan. He was the medicine cat even before Featherwhisker's mentor, Goosefeather. Goosefeather nosed his way through the crowd and dipped his head. "Waterlily. It's great to finally meet you. I have watched you become a fine medicine cat." He purred.

Waterlily's whiskers trembled, not knowing how to react to this interesting meeting of StarClan. She dipped her head back in respect. "Thanks." She replied, closing her eyes and purring.

Goosefeather kneaded the ground, and waited for a few others to come gather around Featherwhisker and Waterlily. Spottedleaf padded up behind Waterlily and brushed past her pelt. Waterlily widened her eyes and pressed her nose into Spottedleaf's flank. "I've missed you." She confessed.

Spottedleaf purred and sat in between Featherwhisker and Waterlily. Many other cats that Waterlily did not know padded over to greet her. She sat in silence and wrapped her tail over her front paws. She glanced over at Featherwhisker. "Why are all of these cats here?" She mewed, questioning her own thoughts.

"We must discuss something." Featherwhisker replied in a soft whisper.

Waterlily tensed. Was she in trouble with the whole of StarClan? She glanced around, scanning for any other medicine cats. But she was the only live one here. She could smell different Clan scents. Some of them were fishy, which she guessed were from RiverClan.

"We are all just worried about Tigerclaw." Goosefeather finally meowed, piercing through Waterlily's thoughts.

"Is he coming back to take revenge on Fireheart?" Mewed Waterlily, tilting her head to one side.

"We can't be sure." It was another Clan warrior who had spoken. It was a tom from WindClan. His pelt smelled of honey with a tint of herbs. *Perhaps he was a medicine cat in WindClan*.

"Mothflight is right." Meowed Featherwhisker, stepping forward.

"Nothing is for sure right now."

A fluffy white she-cat took a pace forward as well. Her pelt looked like someone had splattered black berries all over her. Her blue eyes glinted in the moonlight. "We still fear that he may be up to something. He seemed far too willing to leave ThunderClan." She explained, twitching her tail impatiently.

Waterlily heard everyone's remarks and took them all to heart. She, too, was worried about Tigerclaw coming back to hurt ThunderClan. Waterlily narrowed her eyes. If he did, she would be ready.

She shook her head to clear it, then decided it was time to ask about the prophecy she was told about Shadowkit. "What does Shadowkit have to do with ThunderClan?" She mewed, looking over at Spottedleaf and Featherwhisker.

The other cats around her began to pad away to the pool of water and disappeared from sight. She turned to watch them leave, then turned her sight back to the two medicine cats.

"Shadowkit?" Spottedleaf blinked in confusion, then exchanged a glance with Featherwhisker. Featherwhisker gave her the unsatisfactory shrug and then they both gazed at Waterlily with round eyes.

Waterlily tensed and shuffled her paws. "But you told me not to fear what I find in the shadows." She looked over at Spottedleaf. She was the one who had told her this. Why was she acting weird?

Spottedleaf tilted her head to the side and blinked in confusion. "That was for Tigerclaw. To not let fear take over you." She confessed.

Waterlily's fur bristled. *Why couldn't she have said that?* Waterlily thought bitterly. "I had found this black kit hiding in the shadows. That's why I named him Shadowkit." She explained, flattening her fur.

"Shadowkit may not have been apart of any prophecy, but I am

guessing that you found him for a reason." Purred Spottedleaf. She rubbed Waterlily's cheek with hers then kneaded her paws on the ground below her.

Featherwhisker was just as confused as Spottedleaf was, but agreed that Waterlily could have found him for a reason, just like he had found her.

Featherwhisker and Spottedleaf dipped their heads and they padded away towards the large pool and left Waterlily alone. She watched them leave in silence.

"Waterlily." Meowed a voice. "Time to wake up."

Waterlily blinked open her eyes and saw Yellowfang standing over her. She scrambled to her paws and followed Yellowfang and the other three medicine cats out of the tunnels in silence. Their pawsteps echoed and bounced off the cave walls. As they reached the top, Waterlily's mind became flooded with anticipation. If Shadowkit wasn't apart of any prophecy that StarClan knew of, why did she find him? Was he actually meant to be found? Then suddenly a dark thought clouded her mind with suspicion and worry. *What if Shadowkit is kin with Tigerclaw and he meant for Waterlily to find him as a trap?*

Chapter One

The moonlight took over silverpelt. The light from the moon shined through the brambles covering the nursery entrance. Shadowkit bounced around the clearing alongside Brindleface's kits. Brindleface's kits were much larger and ready to become apprentices.

Fernkit leaped onto her brother, Ashkit. Ashkit squealed then rolled around, toppling over her and pinning her to the ground. Shadowkit watched with amusement and kneaded the ground below him.

"Shadowkit." Meowed Frostfur. She padded up behind him and batted his ear softly. "You know you're not supposed to be out of the nursery at this time of night. You aren't quite big enough to play rough outside the nursery."

Shadowkit hissed and reluctantly followed Frostfur back inside the nursery. "It's not fair." He mewed. "I want to be an apprentice with Fernkit and Ashkit!"

"I know." Frostfur licked Shadowkit between the ears a few times. "You'll be an apprentice before you know it." She added, curling her tail over his tiny body and pulling him closer to her.

Shadowkit stared out between the brambles and watched the two kits wrestling just outside the nursery. Waterlily then padded past the nursery and was heading towards the elders den. She had some herbs in her mouth. "Can I go to the medicine den to see Waterlily?"

Frostfur softly sighed then nodded her head. She lifted her tail and let the black kit bound out of the den. He ran up to Waterlily and greeted her with a purr. "Hi Waterlily!" He exclaimed, louder than he had intended. The medicine cat smelled of sweet herbs.

Waterlily couldn't respond to him from all the abundance of herbs she was carrying, but she let him follow her inside the elder's den. There was nothing wrong letting a kit see the elders.

One-eye rasped her tongue over her shoulder, then down the side of her back. She glanced up at Waterlily, dipped her head, then kept going back to cleaning what the old she-cat could reach. Waterlily dropped the herbs and turned to Shadowkit. "Shadowkit, can you bring me some comfrey from the medicine den?"

Shadowkit's eyes brightened and he bounded away towards the medicine den. Yellowfang was sitting back awkwardly on her haunches, counting poppy seeds when Shadowkit skidded to a halt at the entrance of the den. "Waterlily asked me to fetch some comfrey." He mewed, looking up at her with big round eyes.

Yellowfang looked up at the kit and blinked a few times in confusion before responding. "Of course." She heaved herself up and padded over to the herb store. Shadowkit bounded over to her and watched her scan through all the herbs. There must have been over a million kinds of herbs! His eyes widened with amazement.

"How do you remember all those kinds of herbs?" He mewed, his eyes still wide and round, which had made his head look small.

Yellowfang gently took a few leaves of some comfrey roots and placed them in front of Shadowkit before answering him. "It takes lots of training." She purred.

Shadowkit could sense that she really didn't want him to stay and ask more questions, "Thanks." He purred, then took the comfrey roots in his tiny jaws before bounding back to the elders' den. The herb almost scraped across the clearing as he tried to carry it all by himself. Waterlily greeted him just outside the elders' den and purred with amusement as she watched him carry the bundle of herbs. "I got them!" He mewed, dropping the herbs in front of Waterlily. He watched Waterlily intently as she teared the comfrey into small pieces and then chewed it into a poultice.

Once she was done, he followed her back into the medicine den. "Can I help you with anything else?" He mewed, curiously.

Shadowkit only heard the unsatisfying answer, "I'm sorry, Shadowkit, but I have nothing else to do tonight."

Shadowkit flattened his ears, then began to pad away in sadness. His tail dragging behind him as he walked with heavy steps.

"I promise to come and play with you tomorrow around sun high." She promised, hoping he heard.

Shadowkit stopped in his tracks and his ears and tail stood straight up and he managed to let out a soft purr rumble from his belly. "Okay!" He called out, then bounded back to the nursery. Frostfur would be worried if he didn't come back soon. Frostfur was grooming her chest as he trekked inside and circled the nest Frostfur was sitting in. She stopped grooming and gave him a couple licks, then returned to cleaning her chest.

Shadowkit purred, then settled down to sleep. He couldn't wait till sun high tomorrow. His fur bristled with excitement. Frostfur settled down beside him and curled her tail around him. She pulled him close to her belly, and let sleep take over the both of them.

Shadowkit found himself not able to sleep. He didn't know if it was from excitement or jealousy. He longed to go out exploring the camp, but knew that Frostfur would feel him getting out of the nest. He slowly forced himself to close his eyes. He curled his fluffy tail over his nose and began breathing heavily with sleep. He could hear his mother, Frostfur snoring softly. It calmed him and he was finally able to let dreams take over his mind.

Dawn couldn't come fast enough. Shadowkit woke up, and stretched out his paws, then opened his jaws into a yawn. Frostfur was still sound asleep, snoring a little louder. He got to his paws as silently as he could and leaped out from the grasp of her. He quickly looked back to see if she woke up, but she stayed sleeping.

He softly sighed then padded to the entrance of the nursery. The brambles hung low over his head, but he was still small enough to sit comfortably without the brambles bothering him from above. He watched as the sun beamed through the trees and have way to the dawn light at last.

Whitestorm emerged first out of the warriors' den. His white coat shined almost golden from the dawn light. Fireheart padded out just

after him and stretched out his forepaws. His pelt glowed more ginger than before. It was almost blinding.

"Whitestorm, will you assemble the first dawn patrol?" Meowed Fireheart. His eyes pleaded.

Whitestorm nodded, "You'll have the rest of today's, I presume?" The old white tom meowed, licking a paw and brushing it across his ear.

"Of course."

Whitestorm dipped his head then padded back into the den to grab some warriors for the dawn patrol. Shadowkit saw Fireheart pad past the nursery and he stared deep past him. Shadowkit flinched, thinking maybe he had done something terribly wrong by watching, but when he turned his head, he saw only a pair of amber eyes staring back at the ginger tom. Shadowkit looked back at Fireheart, but made sure to not show any signs of confusion in case he was able to read his expressions from where he was at. The kit he was looking at was Bramblekit. Thoughts clouded his mind. *He is just a kit, why is Fireheart so fearful of him?*

Chapter Two

Waterlily sank her fangs into a small shrew and chewed slowly. Dawn had already passed and it was almost sun high. All the medicine cat chores were finished and the Gathering was tonight. Waterlily took it easy the rest of the day.

Since it was almost sun high, she decided to go play with Shadowkit. She promised to play with him today. Once she finished the last morsel of the shrew, she swiped her tongue over her lips and washed her paw with swift licks. Then she padded to the nursery feeling full and content.

"Shadowkit?" She mewed peering into the nursery just under the brambles. Shadowkit poked out his head and his eyes gleamed with happiness. He bounded over to her and touched his nose to her flank.

"What do you want to play?" Waterlily purred, crouching down to his level.

Shadowkit thought for a bit, looking away into the distance, then looked back at Waterlily with a playful teasing look. "I want to play badger." He finally purred.

Waterlily tilted her head. "Okay, I think that I got this. I'm the badger, I hope?" She mewed, instantly leaped into the hunter's crouch.

Shadowkit squealed with delight then bounded away in a zigzag motion. "Of course!" He called over his shoulder, still running. He then circled around her and jabbed her a few times.

Waterlily stayed crouched, waiting for the perfect moment to spring, but Shadowkit was quite fast on his paws. She playfully narrowed her eyes and leaped into the air and tried to grab his tail, but failed and landed with a thud a mouse-length away. She leaped to her paws, and shook off her pelt. Shadowkit circled around her

again, and leaped onto her back. He squealed with excitement and clung onto her fur for dear life as Waterlily jumped around, trying to get him off. Luckily he was light and his claws didn't hurt her.

They played for a long time. They went from playing badger, to catch the mouse, to a tease of battling ShadowClan. Waterlily felt exhausted. *Who knew kits had so much energy*!

Yellowfang padded out of the medicine den and her eyes gazed on Waterlily still playing with Shadowkit. "Come on!" She rasped. "We must get ready for the Gathering."

Waterlily scrambled to her feet. "I'm sorry, I must go." She mewed, sadly.

"No! Why?" He wailed.

"The Gathering will be starting soon at moon high." She explained.

"I want to go!" He exclaimed, his eyes wide and round.

Waterlily's eyes clouded, "I'm sorry, but you can't. You will soon though when you're an apprentice." She bent down and licked him between his ears.

"Shadowkit, come on inside." Called Frostfur from inside the nursery.

Waterlily licked him between his ears again then bounded off towards the clearing. Yellowfang was already sitting there, beside Whitestorm, Fireheart, Runningwind, and Sandstorm. She joined them and sat down. She noticed that Bluestar had only chose the warriors that weren't close to Tigerclaw. She wondered if it was a coincidence or if she meant to do that.

"So, first Gathering as the new deputy. You excited?" Meowed Whitestorm, nudging Fireheart.

Fireheart looked up at him. He looked as if he was lost in thought and was just forced back into the real world. "I'm... I'm nervous." He stammered.

Whitestorm put his tail over his flank. "Don't worry. You'll be fine. Just don't give anything away. I'm sure the other Clans will have questions about Tigerclaw."

Waterlily's eyes widened. Tigerclaw was respected by many warriors from the other Clans. *What would they think?* She searched Fireheart for any signs of fear, but all she could feel was worry.

Bluestar leaped down from her den and padded into the clearing, her tail held high. Waterlily glanced over at her and watched her in praise and awe. She seemed to be holding up fairly well. She has lost a lot for a leader, but then Waterlily began to sense regret and fear from her as she neared them.

ThunderClan was the last to arrive. Waterlily stood at the top of the hill and looked down. Everyone seemed to have noticed ThunderClan approach and all eyes turned to them. Waterlily tensed. She glanced over at Fireheart and she could tell that he was scanning through the crowd of cats looking for his old friend, Graystripe. She opened her jaws and tasted the air. There was no scent of the gray warrior. Waterlily padded over to him and softly nudged him. "He might be too new to the Clan." She mewed softly in his ear.

Fireheart turned his head and his eyes were round with shock. *How did she always know what I was thinking?* He thought to himself. "Right." He mewed back, padding forward and leading the Clan down the hill into Fourtrees. Waterlily softly sighed, then followed him and the Clan. She veered off to the right where Barkface, Runningnose, and Mudfur were sitting down and sharing tongues. She sat next to Barkface and Yellowfang padded after her and sat down a few tail-lengths beside her. Yellowfang seemed distant, but Waterlily didn't let it bother her.

"Is it true?" Meowed a smoky black tom, "Does ThunderClan have a new deputy?"

Waterlily quickly turned her head and watched Fireheart speak calmly to the RiverClan tom. It was Blackclaw.

"Yes." Fireheart answered, cooly. His voice was a little shaky, but he

kept it together.

"What happened to Tigerclaw?" He sneered.

Fireheart tensed. *Was he supposed to lie and say that he died when he really didn't*? He began thinking on a response, but realized that he wasn't thinking fast enough. Waterlily trekked over to him and answered for him. "It is none of RiverClan's business." She hissed, narrowing her eyes.

She glanced at Fireheart, sorry that she answered for her own deputy, but he dipped his head in thanks.

Crookedstar, the RiverClan leader, heaved himself up onto the largest branch hanging lower than the other two and his voice rang out. "Bluestar wishes to speak first."

Bluestar heaved herself up onto her paws and she laid back on her haunches, awkwardly. "It is true, we have a new deputy." She paused and scanned the clearing. Then her eyes stopped on the flame-colored tom. "Fireheart."

All eyes turned to him. Fireheart wanted to slunk back and become invisible, but knew that was not what a deputy did. So he puffed out his chest and stood proud.

"What happened to Tigerclaw?" It was Nightstar who asked. His voice raspy, and his body looked frail and weak. Waterlily couldn't help but feel bad for the old leader. He looked as if he was going to die almost any second.

"That is none of your concern." Hissed Bluestar. Her eyes narrowed and flashed with anger.

Crookedstar flinched. Bluestar was rarely seen this mad. "We are all curious though." He meowed, sitting up a little straighter. "Did he die?"

Bluestar's blue gaze turned to him. Crookedstar could feel her gaze almost burn him with frustration. She took a small breath, then lashed her tail. "Again, that is none of your concern." She hissed.

Chapter Three

Raises of alarm spread through the clan like a spark of energy. Waterlily quickly got to her paws from her slumber then raced out into the clearing. Her eyes were wide with shock and fear. Cats emerged from their den with the same fear in their eyes. Fireheart leaped out of the warriors den. "What happened?" He meowed, his heart pounding.

"We captured two ShadowClan cats sleeping in ThunderClan territory." It was Sandstorm who answered. Her eyes gleamed with excitement.

Waterlily looked over and saw two ShadowClan warriors. She tensed even more. She recognized one of them at once. *Littlecloud*. Her heart began racing and she started to pad backward, slowly. She stopped just outside the medicine den. She stared at the two scrawny warriors and realized that they were no threat to ThunderClan. They were sick. Really sick.

Fireheart looked at Whitestorm, who had led the dawn patrol. "Did they put up a fight when you found them?"

"No," Whitestorm admitted, flicking his tail. "When we woke them up, Whitethroat and Littlecloud begged us to bring them here."

Fireheart felt confused. "Begged you?" he echoed. "Why would they do that?"

Bluestar emerged from her den. Waterlily sat in silence and watched intently on what Bluestar would do. "What are ShadowClan cats doing here?" She demanded.

"Whitestorm found them on patrol," Fireheart explained quickly. "They were sleeping in ThunderClan territory."

"Sleeping?" Snarled Bluestar, her ears flat against her head. "Well, have we been invaded or not?"

"These were the only warriors we found," Meowed Whitestorm.

"Are you sure?" Demanded Bluestar. "It could be a trap."

Waterlily took a deep breath then raced into the clearing. She stopped in front of the two helpless warriors. She glanced at them with sadness in her eyes. They were weak and frail just like Nightstar was at the Gathering. She then looked at Bluestar, pleadingly, "It is not a trap." She meowed softly. She looked back at them and could feel their pleading eyes staring at Bluestar.

"I will not trust them. Take them back to their Clan." Bluestar growled.

Waterlily took a small pace forward. "These cats are sick, Bluestar." She growled back, her fur bristled. "You may be leader, but I am a medicine cat. Just let me heal them."

Bluestar thought for a few moments before answering. "No. If we heal them and let them go, they may attack us when we least expect it."

Waterlily's amber eyes flashed with anger. "How can you do this?" She hissed. "Do they look like they would fight you?"

Yellowfang padded out of the den and dropped the herbs she had in her mouth. "This is not a curable disease." She rasped. "I have seen this before in ShadowClan. Many cats had died."

Waterlily turned to her and she felt like she was going to burst with frustration. "We can't let them die." Waterlily's voice raised in anger. Yellowfang opened her mouth to respond, but Bluestar beat her to it.

Bluestar narrowed her eyes once more. "Take them back. And that's final." She demanded. "Fireheart." Her tail twitched impatiently, "Take someone with you and make sure they go back to ShadowClan."

Fireheart dipped his head, then scanned the clearing. He padded slowly over to a pale ginger she-cat. "Sandstorm, will you go with me?"

Sandstorm twitched her nose, then purred. "Of course."

With that, Bluestar then heaved herself up and headed back inside her den.

Waterlily stomped back to the medicine den. She knew she was acting like a kit having a temper, but she didn't care. She couldn't see Littlecloud like this. *He had to live!* She didn't know who the other warrior was, but he had to be saved as well. Being a medicine cat meant at least trying to save all the clans, no matter how many battles you may have been with them.

Cinderpelt padded into the den. "I know you'd be able to cure them." She meowed encouragingly. "You cured me." She added. Her eyes were clouded with sadness. She remembered the days that she felt she would not make it as a warrior. Waterlily had binded her leg so tight that the bones practically healed themselves in time. Even though she was not completely healed, she was capable of doing warrior duties.

Waterlily turned to face her. "I-I did." She stammered. Then she stood straighter and felt more confident. "I did. Which means I could cure them."

Cinderpelt took a pace forward and her nose almost touched Waterlily's ear. "I can get whatever herbs you need." She whispered. "I watched you and Yellowfang enough to understand most herbs."

Waterlily looked at her with amusement. "You are a warrior, not a medicine cat." But then she looked out into the distance as if she had an idea. "But..." She continued, "I could use some help on sneaking the herbs to them."

Cinderpelt tilted her head to the side, "So you are going to try to help them?"

Waterlily twitched her nose, almost second guessing herself. She looked down at her paws for a few moments, then she glanced back up at Cinderpelt. "Yes." She mewed softly. "No one else must know. I can teach you what I think could help. No one would suspect you helping them."

Cinderpelt softly sighed then sat down. "Okay. Teach me." She purred, ready to help her.

Waterlily shook her head. "Not here. We must meet in private." She peered outside the medicine den and saw the cats beginning to go back to their duties. Fireheart and Sandstorm trekked up the ravine with the two ShadowClan warriors behind them. They struggled up the ravine and Fireheart had to grab Littlecloud by the scruff. He put him back down once the got to the top. Whitethroat was just as weak, but pushed himself to keep going as Fireheart carried Littlecloud. Once they all reached the top, they padded out of camp and headed for the thunderpath.

Waterlily flicked her tail and began to follow them at a far distance. Cinderpelt was behind her, her ears flat with worry. Waterlily, still trekking along their trail, glanced at Cinderpelt and could feel her worry. It felt like a thorn had just pricked her paws. "It'll be alright." She promised. "If we get caught, let me do the talking."

Chapter Four

Waterlily gathered a pile of herbs and wrapped them up in large beech leaf. She pushed the bundle to the back of the supply store and padded back to the pile of herbs she had left in the middle of the den.

"You still haven't sorted those herbs?" Scoffed Yellowfang as she padded back into the medicine den.

"Well, I was.."

She was cut off by Yellowfang's lashing of her tail. "I don't want to hear excuses, Waterlily. We have much to do today."

"We have plenty of apprentices to take care of the elders bedding and ticks." Waterlily hissed. Her fur bristled, but she quickly pushed it back, knowing it might only make things worse.

"Your mind has been far from that." Rasped Yellowfang. She sat down beside Waterlily and began picking off the ends of some comfrey roots with her teeth.

"What do you mean?" Waterlily's eyes slightly narrowed.

"I mean, you're distracted. Now get going on helping me with these herbs. They won't sort themselves."

Waterlily scoffed. "If only!" She crouched down and began tearing the large dock leaves, making them into smaller pieces.

Cinderpelt padded inside the den. She was just about to blurt out their secret, but she saw Yellowfang in the den and quickly closed her mouth. She kept her gaze on Waterlily, sitting in silence just inside the medicine den. Waterlily looked and stared blankly at Cinderpelt for a short moment, then dipped her head. "I'll have that herb for you in just a moment."

Waterlily then looked back down and teared the last few pieces.

Yellowfang didn't look up from what she was doing. She was counting their supply of poppy seeds. They needed to use the last of them last night on Fireheart. He had come in the middle of the night and asked for some.

Waterlily quickly padded over to the bundle of herbs she had wrapped up and trekked past Yellowfang. She dropped the herbs in front of Cinderpelt. "See if this will help... um, Fireheart to ease his mind." She meowed cooly, hoping that Cinderpelt got the hint.

"Of course. Thanks." Cinderpelt meowed. She took the bundle and padded off out of the den. Waterlily turned and went back to sorting through the herbs they had left to do.

Yellowfang looked up from her counting. "We should have plenty of poppy seeds now for a whole moon." She rasped. Then she turned to face Waterlily. "Why did you make Cinderpelt give the herbs to Fireheart?"

Waterlily tensed. *Did she know something was up*? "Oh, she wanted to help. She had some free time." She lied. She slightly glanced at Yellowfang, to see her reaction.

Yellowfang nodded her head a few times then padded away over to the herb store. Waterlily begged the will of StarClan that she doesn't notice any herbs missing from the store. "Dappletail has been complaining about her bones aching. Could you give these herbs to her? And while you're there, check for fleas. The apprentices can get their ticks if you wish."

Waterlily nodded. She picked up the marigold and dashed out of the den without a word. She didn't want Yellowfang asking her any questions of her awkwardness. Waterlily followed Cinderpelt's scent which was leading up the ravine and out the gorse tunnel.

"Thanks for doing this." Waterlily mewed, sitting down and wrapping her fluffed out tail over her front paws. Cinderpelt mimicked Waterlily's position, but laid a bit awkwardly on her once crippled leg. Waterlily couldn't help but feel bad for her. Her apprenticeship wasn't fair when she got into the trap set up by Tigerclaw. With Fireheart busy with his new apprentice, she had no

time for learning anything new training. Waterlily longed to help her, but knew she couldn't unless she decided to train her as a medicine cat.

"Of course. Anything to help them." Cinderpelt mewed. She could sense that Waterlily was hiding something else besides sympathy, but decided not to prod her about it just yet.

"I have a pile of herbs. If you wish to know what they are a mixture of later, I can tell you, but as of now, let's just see if it helps them." Waterlily meowed, standing to her paws and pushing the bundle closer to Cinderpelt. "I'll go with you, so you know how to apply it next time." She added, padding to find their scent. Cinderpelt padded after her, bringing the bundle of herbs in her jaws.

Waterlily trekked alongside the banks of RiverClan and could smell their trail leading Sunningrocks and RiverClan territory. *Were they crossing into RiverClan*? Waterlily kept on, hoping she was wrong. Their trail stopped just before the border of RiverClan and she opened her jaws to taste the air. She could smell Littlecloud and the sickness he had. She wrinkled her nose then turned around, gazing intently in a bush. The bush shivered for a split second and Waterlily padded toward it.

"Littlecloud?" She meowed softly. "It's alright. I have come to help you."

Littlecloud padded slowly out from under the bush. He looked even smaller and weaker than he ever did. His ribs were poking out and showing through the fur. Waterlily could barely stand to keep facing him. "I'm sorry." She mewed, lowering her head and closing her eyes tightly.

Littlecloud glanced over at Cinderpelt and dipped his head. "Thanks." He rasped, weakly. He padded slowly over to Waterlily and wanted to press himself up against her flank, but knew that if he did, he would risk getting her sick too. Waterlily showed Cinderpelt how to treat them. Cinderpelt watched in silence as Waterlily attempted to heal Littlecloud, then she copied her, doing the same to Whitethroat.

"Let me know if they're doing better. If not, I'll grab a different load of mixed herbs." Meowed Waterlily, shoving the two apprentices back under the bush. "Keep out of the scents of ThunderClan." She ordered. "Keep watch of them for just a bit." She added, turning to Cinderpelt. Cinderpelt dipped her head and stayed with the two ShadowClan warriors almost all night. Cinderpelt felt a pang of pain hit her in the heart. She glanced at Littlecloud watching Waterlily leave, heading back to ThunderClan camp. The ShadowClan warrior was in love with a ThunderClan medicine cat!

Chapter Five

"They're not getting any better." Cinderpelt meowed in Waterlily's ear. Waterlily stopped separating the herbs and looked up at her.

"No." She mewed, her voice shaking, "I don't know what else to try. We've tried everything." Waterlily confessed, lowering her head in pain. If she lost Littlecloud, she would never forgive herself. *He has to get better!* Waterlily looked at the herb supply and studied it for a good long moment. Then she turned to Cinderpelt, her eyes clouded with concern. "I only have one more thing that I can try."

Cinderpelt stood straighter and rounded her eyes. "Let's try it."

Waterlily made another bundle of herbs. It contained of catmint, chamomile, chervil, feverfew, and honey. "Let's hope this works." She mewed, dropping the bundle in front of Cinderpelt. Cinderpelt dipped her head and bounded off out of the den with the herbs. Waterlily bounded after her and followed her for what seemed like a long route. Waterlily could feel her legs screaming with pain. She was so used to exercising her mind instead of her body.

Cinderpelt stopped in Sunningrocks and padded through a thick bush of brambles. Waterlily padded behind her and her fur began to get covered in brambles. She would never hear the end of it from Yellowfang if she came back with it still covering her.

Littlecloud was still very weak and looked up at Waterlily. His clouded eyes brightened. Waterlily could feel his fever rising from where she stood and his ShadowClan scent was covered with sickness. Waterlily wanted to wrinkle her nose from the stench, but held back the urge. "You'll get better." She promised, purring.

Littlecloud tried to let out a meow, but nothing came out. Cinderpelt dropped the mixture of herbs and both warriors ate as much of it as they could. Waterlily watched them in awe, as if she was willing them to get better in an instance. Littlecloud let out a loud cough and then a gasp that led after it. Waterlily widened her

eyes and watched in horror until he finally caught his breath.

"It seemed to have stayed in this time." Mewed Cinderpelt.

"What do you mean, this time?" Waterlily tilted her head to the side.

"They threw it up last time which is probably why they didn't get any better." She explained.

Waterlily glanced back at Littlecloud and Whitethroat. She softened her gaze and purred softly. "Get better, please." She mewed, almost too silently for Cinderpelt to hear.

Cinderpelt watched Waterlily and took a small pace backwards. Her mind began racing with questions. Waterlily turned to Cinderpelt then they both padded back into camp. Just before they reached the ravine leading down to camp, Cinderpelt pressed herself against Waterlily. "Do you..." She hesitated for a short moment, "Do you have feelings for Littlecloud?"

Waterlily stopped and tensed. She could feel her heart racing and she wanted to sprint into camp without answering. "I-um." She stuttered, "No. I just care for sick cats no matter what Clan they're from."

Cinderpelt softly narrowed her eyes. "You can tell me. I won't say anything, I promise."

Waterlily sat down and took a big sigh. "I loved him before I became a medicine cat." She confessed. "When I became a medicine cat apprentice, I vowed to not let myself get distracted with love and decided it was just a crush."

Cinderpelt stood in silence as if she was thinking on what to say next, then she finally spoke, "I believe he has the same feelings."

It was not what Waterlily wanted to hear. She hung her head low, closed her eyes tightly, and let herself get deep in thought. She wanted to bring herself back to the time when she didn't have medicine cat duties and could be with a mate. Hiding having a mate in a different Clan was easier than hiding having a mate when it's

forbidden. She thought of having kits running around the camp, and them becoming apprentices, then warriors.

Cinderpelt cut into her thoughts, "Being a medicine cat is not easy on that part, is it?"

Waterlily looked up at her with sorrow in her eyes, "No. It is not." She meowed softly, looking out into the distance.

Cinderpelt didn't say anything more. Waterlily then shook her head and flicked her tail for them to get going back into camp before anyone noticed they were gone. Yellowfang was out collecting herbs and was back already in the medicine den when Waterlily returned.

"Where were you?" Yellowfang rasped.

Waterlily wanted to tell her everything, but couldn't. Yellowfang had said that the disease was incurable. She wouldn't understand or try to help. "I needed some air, so I went out of camp for a bit."

"Feel better?"

Waterlily nodded her head, though she suspected that Yellowfang knew something was up and that not everything was being said.

"It's half moon tonight." Yellowfang changed the subject, probably thinking that Waterlily didn't want to talk about whatever was bothering her.

Waterlily yawned, then mewed in a sleepy voice, "Yeah, we should probably leave now if we want to beat the moon rising too early."

Yellowfang nodded her head, agreeing. Once they took the traveling herbs, they padded off towards the thunderpath and followed alongside it, keeping in their territory this time. Waterlily was glad. She didn't want to think about ShadowClan. She followed Yellowfang into WindClan territory and met up with Barkface. Barkface padded beside Waterlily and matched her steps.

"Have you smelled any rogues near you?" Barkface mewed.

Waterlily flinched. Barkface rarely made conversation. He was always the quiet one and wanted to just get there and go home. "Rogues?" Waterlily then tensed. *Was he talking about Tigerclaw? Was Tigerclaw still out there and really planning on coming back just like he had said?*

"Our patrols have been smelling a strange scent near our borders lately. I thought maybe you have as well."

"N-no." She stammered, trying to sound confident.

"I would let Bluestar know to look out for them, then. They could be a threat to all our Clans."

Chapter Six

Shadowkit flattened his ears. He curled his lip into a snarl and growled lightly. "You will pay." He hissed. He leaped into the air and found only blood below his paws. The scent of the blood filled his nostrils. He gasped in horror then looked up and around him. The forest became dark and he felt alone.

Shadowkit woke up with a jolt and panted hard. Frostfur stirred in her sleep but didn't wake up. Shadowkit scrambled to his paws and padded lightly out of the nursery and stopped just outside the entrance. He sat down and looked out into the distance. All was quiet. Then he looked down at his paws. There was no blood. He sighed with relief and just continued to sit in silence and watch the rising sun.

His paws itched to go exploring beyond the nursery. If he did, his apprenticeship might be postponed. He was going to stay in camp until he was an apprentice just like he should. The Clan already didn't like him because he used to be a rogue.

"Shadowkit, you're up early." It was Whitestorm who spoke.

Shadowkit slightly bristled his fur and turned to face the white warrior. "I just had a bad dream is all." He meowed.

Whitestorm lifted his muzzle curiously. "What was it about?"

"I'm not sure. I don't really remember." He lied. Shadowkit remembered it well. It felt so real to him. The scent of blood was all too real for him and he almost shuddered, but held it back, hoping Whitestorm didn't notice.

"I see. Dreams are a wonderful thing." He meowed with amusement in his voice.

Did Whitestorm suspect that he was lying? Shadowkit blinked blankly at him a few times before answering. "I guess so."

"Don't worry little one. You'll understand someday." Whitestorm purred, softly nudged his flank, then padded a few fox-lengths away back to his sitting post of the night watch.

Shadowkit bristled his fur in annoyance. *What did the white warrior think? Did he think that he was some useless kit?* He narrowed his eyes and looked into the distance, watching the sun finally peering through the trees.

Fireheart emerged from the den and assembled the dawn patrol. He seemed to be getting the hang of it. Darkstripe, Sandstorm and Runningwind went out first. Fernpaw, Darkstripe's apprentice, was able to go along with them. Then Whitestorm, Longtail and Willowpelt were to go on the next patrol.

Shadowkit watched as the cats emerged from their slumber. Frostfur padded out of the nursery and sat by him, wrapping her tail over her paws. "You're up early." She mewed.

"I couldn't sleep. I had a weird dream." He confessed.

Frostfur pressed her flank lightly against his. "You can tell me anything." She purred.

Shadowkit felt safe by those words. Even though Frostfur wasn't his real mother, she made sure to make him feel like she was. He rumbled out a purr and pressed his body against hers. "Thank you, Frostfur."

The day went by pretty slowly and the warriors went in and out of the camp. Shadowkit watched in silence. He gave himself some furious licks on the chest every now and then. The new-leaf's breeze fluffed out his fur and he could smell lots of prey coming into camp. New-leaf must have brought in lots of prey to eat!

Shadowkit grabbed a small mouse for himself and ate a fox-length away from the fresh-kill pile. Thornpaw padded up the pile and jeered at Shadowkit's side. "Come on, kittypet." He hissed. "Fight me."

Shadowkit narrowed his eyes and crouched down to pounce, but

hesitated. He stood straight up again. "No. Warriors don't fight for joy. I am loyal to my Clan." He meowed, cooly.

Thornpaw widened his eyes, then narrowed them to slits in anger. "You're afraid." He sneered, pulling his lip back into a snarl.

"If you think so."

Thornpaw shook his head. *Why was he being so calm?* It made him even angrier. Thornpaw leaped and jabbed his flank with his paw, then quickly got out of the way. Shadowkit lunged forward, seeing that he was getting ready to leap on him, but he wasn't fast enough. His side began hurting like crazy and he shook out some loose fluffs. Every hair on his pelt was bristled and told him to fight this apprentice, but he knew he wouldn't win this fight. "I am not fighting you. It wouldn't be very fair."

Thornpaw growled, and narrowed his eyes again. "Fighting isn't supposed to be fair. You're an outsider and always will be."

Fireheart padded into the den with Sandstorm at his side. He raced over to the apprentice and gave him a hard glare, "Do I need to assign you more apprentice duties?"

Thornpaw stood up straight and softly sighed, still anger flashing in his eyes. "No." He growled, then padded away back towards the apprentice den.

Shadowkit sighed with relief. He didn't want to have to fight for his life. Thornpaw was much bigger than he was.

Fireheart turned to Shadowkit and lightly touched his shoulder with his tail. "Not being born in the Clan is hard."

Shadowkit softly hissed at his words. "I know that already." He spat.

Fireheart flinched, not thinking the kit would talk back to him. *Did he say it wrong?* He shook his head, "Sorry, I just wanted to tell you that you're doing good. You stood up to an apprentice and handled it very well." He paused for a short moment. "Like a true warrior." He added softly.

Shadowkit widened his eyes in amazement. The deputy was giving him a compliment. "Uh, thanks." He mewed, his voice cracking a tiny bit. He couldn't think of anything more to say to the great warrior. Waterlily had spoken highly of him, and him to be deputy just after a few moons of being a warrior must have been a great honor. Shadowkit felt like he could trust this cat. *Fireheart is going to be a great leader when Bluestar is gone.*

Chapter Seven

"What are you doing here?" Hissed Fireheart. "Go back home." Waterlily crouched down in a bramble bush just before Sunningrocks and watched as Fireheart attempted to chase off the two warriors. Waterlily was just about to go out and stand up for them, but Cinderpelt beat her to it.

"Leave them alone!" She hissed, running up to him.

Fireheart quickly turned to her and lashed his tail, angrily. "Why are they here?"

Cinderpelt shuffled her paws and looked down at the ground. "I wanted to help them." She confessed.

"How and why?" He hissed, narrowing his eyes.

"I found them and I knew if we... I mean I, didn't help, they would die."

Fireheart tilted his head in confusion. "We?" He meowed, curiously.

"We." Waterlily padded out from under the bush. Brambles clung to her long fur.

Fireheart glanced confusingly at both cats with wide eyes. "Someone will find out." He growled softly.

"They won't." Waterlily urged. "They'll be better before someone does."

"You found a cure?" Fireheart sounded surprised.

Cinderpelt nodded. "Waterlily is a very gifted medicine cat." She turned to Waterlily and purred.

Waterlily couldn't help but feel overwhelmed by her praise. She didn't feel that special, though she knew Cinderpelt would be proud

because she saved her from being a useless warrior. "Thank you, Cinderpelt." She softly mewed.

Fireheart stood speechless for a few moments before finally speaking. "Does Yellowfang know?"

Waterlily and Cinderpelt shook their heads simultaneously and sat down. Waterlily wrapped her tail over her front paws. Cinderpelt sat awkwardly on her haunches. "She mustn't know." Waterlily mewed.

Fireheart dipped his head in respect. "Very well. I won't say anything. Once they're healed fully, let me know."

"Of course." It was Cinderpelt who answered.

Waterlily's whiskers twitched in amusement as she padded behind Fireheart back to camp. He was silent on the way back, but she could tell his mind was racing. She slightly squinted and stared into his thoughts. She could sense worry. But not for them. For his apprentice. *Why was he worried about Cloudpaw?*

Waterlily shook her head to clear it once they reached the gorse tunnel leading to camp. Cinderpelt followed Waterlily to the medicine den. They both stopped just outside the den and sat down, looking in to make sure Yellowfang wasn't too close to hear them. "I'll check on them tonight." She whispered. "Check on them tomorrow morning and then we'll find out if the herbs are working."

Cinderpelt nodded then bounded off towards the warriors' den. Waterlily softly sighed then padded into the medicine den and Yellowfang sleeping beside the roots in the back.

***

"They seem to be doing better. I think it's working." Purred Cinderpelt.

Waterlily sighed with relief. Cinderpelt now knew her feelings towards the small ShadowClan warrior and she could finally be herself around her. "Thank you for not telling anyone my secret." She mewed.

Cinderpelt dipped her head. "Of course." She then looked at the two ShadowClan warriors, "Should we stay with them for a while longer?" She added, softly.

"No. Go on back to camp. I think they're able to leave now. I will let Littlecloud know the herbs and have him send them to Runningnose so he can cure the Clan." She didn't take her eyes off Littlecloud's blue gaze.

Cinderpelt nodded, bounded off, then looked back for a few seconds before continuing on to camp.

Waterlily blinked lovingly at Littlecloud and purred. "I'm glad you're doing better."

Whitethroat blinked in confusion. He suspected that Littlecloud loved Waterlily, but didn't think she reciprocated his love. He sat with weary in his eyes and he watched the two cats exchange a glance he never thought would happen. *They really did both love one another. But they were saying goodbye.* He felt confused, but dared not to interfere.

"We will see one another again. I'll come to the border at sun high and tell you the herbs." Waterlily promised, purring and pressing herself against him.

Littlecloud pressed his body against hers as well and closed his eyes, purring loudly. "Yes, we will." He echoed her promise and with that, they both dipped their heads and headed opposite ways. Waterlily looked back over her shoulder and watched Littlecloud and Whitethroat leave ThunderClan territory. They were still weak, but seemed to be able to get around better than they did.

She was glad they were leaving. She didn't have to sneak around anymore. Yellowfang could stop worrying about her and maybe she can finally concentrate on the medicine cat duties. But she knew that wasn't possible. He would be in her mind for a long time.

She turned back and headed towards camp. Cinderpelt was just a few fox-lengths ahead of her. Waterlily caught up with her and matched her pace, step by step. "I hope we did the right thing." She

mewed softly.

Cinderpelt glanced at her in confusion. "Why wouldn't we have? They were sick and needed your help."

Waterlily flicked her tail impatiently, but knew she was right. Cinderpelt gave her too much credit. Knowing what she went through, she knew why she looked up to her so much.

Yellowfang padded out of the medicine den and addressed Waterlily with a wave of her tail. Waterlily bounded over to her, leaving Cinderpelt alone to do her own normal warrior duties. "What's up?" She mewed.

"Where have you been going? And you smell of crow food." Yellowfang wrinkled up her nose in disgust.

"Oh, I..." She couldn't lie anymore to her mentor. Yellowfang was her friend and she didn't want a bad relationship with her. She softly sighed then looked down at her paws and shuffled them nervously. "I was helping the ShadowClan cats. You know, the ones that were sick and came here for help?"

Yellowfang widened her eyes. "You went against Bluestar's orders?" She rasped, her eyes then narrowing to slits.

"They were dying. I cured them."

"You...you cured them? Of the sickness that was incurable?"

Waterlily nodded her head. "Yes."

Yellowfang sat down and wrapped her scraggly tail over her front paws. "You are a remarkable medicine cat, Waterlily. I don't know how you do it, but you are a gifted healer."

Chapter Eight

With the words from Yellowfang, Waterlily felt off the next day. She couldn't concentrate on the herbs and ended up having to restock because she put in some herbs in the wrong place.

"You are awfully quiet and distracted this morning." Rasped Yellowfang. She padded into the medicine den full of more herbs then laid them down just as she was speaking.

"I just feel off today is all." She confessed, shuffling her paws over a few dead dock leaves. They made a soft crunching noise. Waterlily wanted to purr with amusement, but instead she pushed back the urge and looked up at Yellowfang.

"Those leaves are dead." Hissed Yellowfang. "You can dispose of them. They are of no good to us."

Waterlily looked back down at the dead leaves. She didn't think they were useless, but she obeyed her mentor's orders and took the dock leaves and let them float in the wind just outside the den. The wind took them away high in the air and blew over the camp and far into the trees. Waterlily watched them go and twitched her tail in slight fury. *What a waste*!

"Take these to the elders. One-eye is complaining of aching bones. I guess the others will be thankful for some treatment as well." Yellowfang set down a large bundle of marigold a mouse-length behind Waterlily.

Waterlily turned and silently nodded her head, then bounded off towards the elder's den with the marigold in her jaws.

"First we had too much water, and now we have a drought. Too much of this if you ask me." Rasped One-eye. She twitched her scrawny tail rapidly in annoyance.

Dappletail rolled her eyes. "You are never satisfied with the

weather." She retorted.

Waterlily ignored their quarrels and set down the marigold in front of the awake elders. One-eye drove her one good eyed gaze over to her and dipped her head. "I have some fleas in my neck if you have time to get them." She rasped, blinking and pleading.

Waterlily nodded then set the other bundle of marigold in front of Dappletail. "Just in case you or the others need some." She then turned to One-eye and searched for the fleas she was complaining about.

"I haven't seen Bluestar in a moon." Dappletail finally broke the silence.

Waterlily crunched down onto a flea, splitting it between her teeth, then softly spitting out the remaining that stuck in her teeth just beside her.

"She's been in her den most of the time." Halftail had woken up. His eyes were still sleepy and had a bit of goop in the corners.

"If you ask me, she's probably terrified of Tigerclaw." Rasped One-eye.

Waterlily rolled her eyes. One-eye always has an opinion, though she was right about Bluestar. "What do you think, Waterlily?" One-eye added, glancing over her shoulder.

Waterlily cracked another flea with her teeth then lifted her head. "Bluestar is quite scared. Everyone is. Tigerclaw might come back for revenge on Fireheart. Having another deputy killed because of him would be too tragic."

One-eye blinked in confusion. "You really think he might come back? Are you scared as well?"

Waterlily nodded her head softly. "He might. I'm not for certain. But we shouldn't assume he won't." She paused for a quick moment. "No, I'm not scared." She lied. She had to be brave. No one else besides Fireheart was staying strong.

Halftail didn't look convinced. "You really aren't afraid?" He urged.

Waterlily cracked the last flea hanging onto One-eye's flank, then she looked up at Halftail. Her eyes narrowed a little bit. "My fear is the Clan getting destroyed. Not of Tigerclaw." She reassured him.

Halftail dipped his head. "You are very wise, Waterlily. ThunderClan is lucky to have you as their medicine cat."

Waterlily purred then padded out of the elders' den. She made a huge sigh of relief once she got back into the medicine den. Yellowfang must have been out doing something else, for she was alone. Just how she liked it.

She began pulling out some of the herbs to count them. They were low on marigold. She pulled the marigold leaves and began counting them, but very slowly. The words from Yellowfang and Halftail struck her more than she thought it would. Everyone was saying how great of a medicine cat she was, but she felt useless half the time.

Yellowfang padded in the den. She seemed in a rather good mood. "Good you're back. Once you're finished, come find me. I'll be just outside camp near the dirt place." Then she quickly padded away before Waterlily could ask any questions.

Waterlily tilted her head to the side. *Why the dirt place?* She blinked a few times looking out into the distance, then went back to her counting the marigold leaves. "One, two, three, four, five." She pushed the leaves to the side of her, then continued, "Six, seven, eight and nine." She pushed those to the side as well, then began on the next pile of herbs.

"One, two, three, four..."

Yellowfang peered around the entrance of the den. "Are you not done yet?" She rasped.

Waterlily looked up from counting the large burdock leaves. "I just started when you first came in." She retorted quickly.

Yellowfang made a small hissing sound then flicked her tail in

annoyance. "Well, leave them and come back later to it."

Waterlily narrowed her eyes. *Why was she being edgy?* She got to her paws then padded after Yellowfang. They both scrambled tiredly up the ravine and the opposite way of the dirt place. Waterlily sighed with relief. She did not want to be near it.

"You have been my apprentice for quite some time." Yellowfang started, looking around and making sure no other cat was within ear shot. She sat down awkwardly on her haunches. "You really are a gifted medicine cat."

Waterlily bristled her fur and hissed, cutting off Yellowfang. "Could you please stop saying that! I am not that gifted. I know just as much as you do, probably less. I am nowhere near ready to be the full medicine cat. Without you, I would never have done the things I would have done today."

Yellowfang flinched, but didn't take her yellow gaze off Waterlily's. "You have done things that I couldn't. You cured a sickness that I thought couldn't be cured. You helped Cinderpelt become a warrior."

Waterlily narrowed her eyes, then looked away from Yellowfang's gaze. She couldn't meet her mentor's eyes. She felt ashamed for lashing out and embarrassed that she did so when she knew that she did do those things. "I'm sorry." She softly meowed, keeping her head low.

"Anyways, that's not what I want to talk about." Yellowfang paused for a brief moment then continued. "I noticed you and Littlecloud exchanged glances when he came into ThunderClan seeking for aid. I can't help but ask, is there something going on between you two?"

Chapter Nine

Waterlily tensed. She could feel her heart beginning to race and her paws trembled. She felt lost for words and thought about saying she didn't love him, but she'd be lying. Too much of that has already happened.

She shook her head to clear it then let her eyes cloud with memories as she spoke. "Before I became a medicine cat apprentice, I had befriended Littlecloud. I fell in love with him soon after, but I promise you nothing is going on between us. I am a medicine cat and I know the rules of the code." She winced at her own words knowing that Yellowfang had broken that same part of the code.

"I see." Came the unsatisfying answer from Yellowfang.

Waterlily tried to search Yellowfang's thoughts, but her mind was blank and filled with amusement. "That's it?" She finally said, blinking in confusion.

"Did you think I would believe that?"

Waterlily looked down at her paws and shuffled them. "Well yeah." She hissed. "Because it's true!"

Yellowfang narrowed her eyes, but purred with amusement. "Of course. You know very well what I went through. Don't do the same." Her amusement faded and was soon turned into sorrow and regret.

Waterlily quickly went to Yellowfang's side and pressed her body close to hers.

Yellowfang hung her head low and stayed silent for a few more moments. She accepted Waterlily's comfort for once and she felt calm.

***

Waterlily scrambled to her paws tiredly. She was just about to head in into the elders den for their daily dose of marigold when she heard Fireheart shouting at Cloudpaw.

"Only because you're stuffed with kittypet slop!" Fireheart spat. "Why did you come back at all?"

"Why wouldn't I? I'm just visiting the Twolegs for food." Cloudpaw sounded genuinely puzzled. "What's the problem?"

Waterlily pricked her ears, but didn't turn her head as she padded a little slower to the elders' den.

Fireheart growled, baring his teeth, "I can't help wondering if your mother did the right thing in giving up her firstborn kit to be a Clan cat."

"Well, she's done it now," Cloudpaw hissed back. "So you're stuck with me!" His voice trailed off as she padded into the elders' den. Dappletail and Halftail were sound asleep, while One-eye and Patchpelt laid awkwardly on their haunches trying to clean their chest fur.

"If you ask me, those pesky fleas are getting..." One-eye paused, blinking her one good eye at Waterlily. "Hi Waterlily. Is it that time already?"

Waterlily nodded. "The fleas are getting pretty bad lately, eh?" She finished for One-eye.

One-eye nodded slowly. "I have a few on my shoulders, and Patchpelt has some on his neck where he can't reach."

Patchpelt lifted his head and blinked tiredly. "Yes, it will feel good to get them out."

Waterlily buried her nose into Patchpelt's neck. She searched blindly for fleas and found two just at the scruff. She crunched down on the one, then the other. Then a few were buried deep just beside his shoulder blade. She nosed her way down.

"Fireheart was a good choice for deputy." Patchpelt rasped, just

after yawning.

Waterlily crunched down the last two fleas. "He will be a great leader." She agreed.

Once Waterlily was finished with both cats, she gave them their dose of marigold and went on her way. She could hear faint whispers of the elder's voices as she bounded back to the medicine den.

Yellowfang was sorting through the last bunch of comfrey and catchweed. She lifted her head just as Waterlily padded inside. "Oh, we are need of more chervil." She rasped.

Waterlily nodded tiredly. "Of course. I'll go out and grab some on the way back. I want to make sure Littlecloud has the right herbs to cure his Clan."

Yellowfang flicked her tail in annoyance, but nodded her head softly. "Sure." She mumbled, "just hurry back."

Waterlily bounded off towards snakerocks with a bundle of herbs in her jaws. She padded up the ravine and out the gorse tunnel, her tail held high. The wind began to blow and she sighed in relief. The days were becoming hot on her fur and the sudden breeze felt good.

Just as she approached Sunningrocks, she fluffed out her fur and growled at the sound of the monsters rumbling on the black thunderpath. She took a deep breath and raced across and into ShadowClan territory. She dropped down the herbs and opened her jaws to taste the air. Littlecloud's scent was not among any of the scents. ShadowClan's scent was very faint in general, like they haven't marked their borders in a while. She then began sorting the herbs into different piles.

Then she suddenly smelled a familiar scent. *Littlecloud!* She whirled around and rounded her eyes. Littlecloud padded slowly to her. "I thought I smelled you." He mewed. His voice was still a little raspy, but he looked much better than he did last time she saw him.

"It's sun high." She reminded him. "Are you ready to know the

herbs?"

Littlecloud nodded his head and sat down, looking at the piles of herbs that were laid down in front of her.

"This," She pointed to a green leaf. It smelled sweet and a little minty. "is catmint. It's usually used for greencough."

She then pointed her muzzle to the next pile. "This is chamomile. It is a calming herb. It helps cats calm down if anxious or can't sleep."

Littlecloud widened his eyes and purred with amusement. He felt like he wasn't going to remember, but he knew he had to, to help save his Clan.

Waterlily then went to the next herb. It was a rather pretty herb. Small daisies clung to together by a clump of a bush. "This is feverfew. It is great for fevers, but also good for body aches and pains."

Then the last pile was a large leaf that had some liquid just sitting in the middle. "This is honey. It soothes infections, but also helps bitter herbs taste better."

Littlecloud purred, closed his eyes, trying to remember all what was said. "I think that I got it." He mewed, happily.

"There's one more that we don't have here." She confessed. "I am on the lookout for it, but maybe Runningnose will have that herb already."

"What herb might that be?" He meowed, impatiently.

"Chervil."

"Is that it?" His mew was a little hoarse and he cleared his throat.

Waterlily slightly tilted her head to the side. "Did you want that to be all?" Her voice was a little shaken. *Did he not love her anymore? Perhaps he finally moved on.*

Littlecloud shuffled his paws and didn't look Waterlily in the eyes. "I

still..." He paused, not knowing what to say. He did still love her, but he knew that he needed to move on. "I just want to say thanks."

Waterlily dipped her head. "Of course. I'd do it again in a heartbeat if I had to." She promised.

Her amber gaze burned through Littlecloud. He could feel her staring at him. He felt like she was hoping that he would say the same. "You know I'd do the same for you." He finally purred, looking up at her.

His bright blue eyes locked on Waterlily's amber gaze and they said nothing for a few short moments. Littlecloud then dipped his head and took the knowledge he got from her back to Runningnose. Waterlily watched him leave in silence. She softly sighed then purred just faint enough for only herself to hear. "I still do love you." She whispered after him, knowing that Littlecloud was too far for him to hear her.

Chapter Ten

Shadowkit bounced around the nursery like some sort of banshee. Frostfur had to hold him down as she licked him between the ears. "Stop wriggling!" She hissed.

"I can't help it." He squeaked. "I'm going to be an apprentice soon!"

"Not looking like this." She retorted, in between licks. She then licked his face a few times before letting him scamper out of the den. "Don't go out into the clearing until Bluestar has called!" She added as she padded after him.

Shadowkit halted at the nursery entrance. He was now taller and had to duck a bit if he wanted to sit there again. So he just sat outside the nursery, looking out anxiously and waiting for Bluestar's call.

Sunhigh was not coming fast enough! Most of the warriors haven't come back yet from their patrols. Frostfur sat beside him and put her tail lightly on his shoulder. "Patience, Shadowkit. Sunhigh will be here before you know it. But for now, waiting will only make it seem longer."

Shadowkit sighed. He knew she was right. *Why must she always be right?*

Fernpaw padded into the camp and headed straight for Shadowkit. She sat down in front of him and began purring. "I just heard the news. Are you excited?"

Shadowkit couldn't hold in his excitement. "Yes!"

Fernpaw let out a mrrow of laughter. "Of course you are. I remember how excited I was too. Just remember, don't be too nervous. You'll do great!" She reassured him.

Shadowkit took a step closer to her and touched his cheek against

hers. "Thanks." He purred. "That means a lot to me."

Fernpaw purred softly, then bounded across the clearing just as warriors from their patrols were beginning to return. Bluestar then padded out of her den. Shadowkit searched the leader for excitement, but all he could feel was pain and regret. *Did she not want to make me an apprentice?* He shook his head to clear it then padded out slowly just as she called the familiar words.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the highrock for a Clan meeting." Bluestar stood tall, but her sides were heaving like she was out of breath. Shadowkit sat at the edge of the clearing next to Waterlily and Frostfur. Waterlily's purr was so loud that it was probably heard throughout the whole Clan.

Bluestar scanned the clearing and her blue gaze stopped on Shadowkit. Shadowkit wanted to slink back into the nursery, but held his head up high. "Shadowkit." She beckoned him with her tail. "Please come forward."

Shadowkit padded to the front, looking around at the Clan of cats as he did. Thornpaw was sitting on the other side of the clearing. He glanced over at him, wondering what his reaction might be. He just sat silently, showing no emotions. He then looked back up at Bluestar, his green eyes brightening.

"Shadowkit, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Shadowpaw." She paused, looking around at the warriors. She seemed distracted, and kept scanning the camp, like she couldn't remember the names of the warriors. Then she finally looked back at Shadowpaw. "Sandstorm will be your mentor."

Sandstorm pricked her ears and her head shot up in dismay. Her eyes widened and she froze, not knowing what to do. Fireheart nudged her, edging her on to go up there. Sandstorm flinched, then shook her head as if to clear it. Then she padded slowly up to Shadowpaw.

"You are brave, Sandstorm. I believe you are ready for your first apprentice. I expect your bravery to show in him once he becomes a full warrior." Bluestar went on.

Sandstorm's green gaze locked onto Shadowpaw. Shadowpaw could feel her anxiety, but there was also excitement in her voice as she spoke. "I will work as hard as I can." She promised, not taking her eyes off him.

Shadowpaw didn't know whether she was happy to have him as her apprentice or disappointed. He touched noses with her, just as he had seen Ashpaw and Fernpaw do with their mentors. It was a sign of acceptance, though he wondered if she really accepted him.

"Shadowpaw! Shadowpaw!" Yowled the Clan around them.

Shadowpaw could hear Waterlily above all the voices. He purred and softly kneaded the ground. Sandstorm glanced over at Fireheart. Their eyes met and she seemed worried. Shadowpaw tensed. *Perhaps she really didn't want to be his mentor after all.*

Bluestar padded back into her den as always and the Clan was going back to their normal duties. Sandstorm looked back at Shadowpaw, her eyes filled with worry, but she was obviously trying to hide it. "Come on." She meowed softly. "I'll show you where you can sleep in the apprentice den, then we can go out on the next patrol if you like."

Shadowpaw swiftly nodded, then bounded after her. She trekked into the apprentices' den and padded into the back. "It's a little tight in here, but I think that this nest should be empty." She looked over at Shadowpaw. "Once you've finished settling in, come find me out in the clearing. I'll show you around our borders so you can get to know them before it gets too dark."

Shadowpaw swiftly nodded then glanced around. The apprentice den was smaller than he imagined, but he could feel excitement rising in his chest. Then he suddenly remembered the words that jabbed at his throat. *You're an outsider and always will be.*

Thornpaw was going to be his enemy for as long as he made him to be. He opened his jaws to taste the air. He was searching for Thornpaw's scent. He didn't want his nest close to his. Having an enemy in the Clan is not good, but it's what Thornpaw seemed to have wanted. Shadowpaw knew he had a disadvantage of being an

outsider, but he wasn't going to let another apprentice ruin his chance of becoming a great warrior.

Chapter Eleven

Shadowpaw bounded out of the apprentice den and just as Sandstorm had said, she sat in the clearing below the highrock. She waited in silence, while Fireheart was sitting beside her. She twitched her tail impatiently.

Sandstorm glanced over and saw Shadowpaw nearing them. "Good. Once the others get here, we'll be on our way."

"Others?" Shadowpaw tilted his head to the side.

"Yes. Dustpelt and Mousefur are joining us, along with their apprentices."

Shadowpaw narrowed his eyes. Thornpaw was Mousefur's apprentice. Which meant he had to train with him. He quickly brushed the thought away and hid his anxiety. If Sandstorm knew he and Thornpaw quarreled, it might ruin his chance of going out tonight.

Thornpaw padded behind Mousefur. Dustpelt and Ashpaw came up just a fox-length behind them. Thornpaw narrowed his eyes as he neared Shadowpaw, but he didn't say anything taunting. "Are we training together?" His meow was rather soft.

Mousefur shook her head. "No. Just going out on patrol."

Thornpaw had a bit of disappointed in his eyes. Shadowpaw couldn't help but feel confused about his emotions. *Did this tom hate him or not?* He thought of a response, but it would only provoke a fight.

"Are we ready?" Sandstorm meowed, twitching one of her ears.

The warriors nodded, then they all trekked up the ravine. Shadowpaw bounded after them, but struggled up the steep hill. He wasn't small for his age, but he was rather weak. The others had

practice while this was his first time leaving the camp. He scrambled up, but lost his balance and almost skidded back down. Sandstorm looked over her shoulder and saw that he was far behind. She raced back down.

"I can do this myself!" He spat, angrily. He felt hot with embarrassment on her attempt to help, but he didn't need to look useless like a kit. He narrowed his eyes to slits, took a big sigh then raced up the ravine. He made it, but just barely. That would be something he had to get used to. He shook out his pelt, then padded after Sandstorm and the others. Sandstorm tried to slow down to his pace, but Shadowpaw hissed almost every time she got near him.

"Over here is RiverClan." Sandstorm mewed. She pointed across the river with her muzzle. Shadowpaw glanced over at the stream. The stream rippled, making loud *whooshing* noises in his ear. "The border lies at the stream. They like to think Sunningrocks is theirs, but it's ours." She boasted. "Anyways, we are able to get water, but the fish is theirs."

Shadowpaw stayed silent. He looked around at the borders, getting to know them. He opened his jaws and tasted the air. The air smelled of fish. He wrinkled his nose in disgust. "Yuck!" He hissed.

Sandstorm nodded her head. "Yes. Yuck indeed. I never liked the scent of RiverClan. But wait till you smell ShadowClan."

Shadowpaw rolled his eyes. He knew what ShadowClan smelled like. Sandstorm must have forgotten that he was found near Snake Rocks which was near the thunderpath. On the other side, he knew was ShadowClan. Sandstorm softly sighed then continued on padding alongside the others.

Thornpaw kept his distance, while Ashpaw seemed to not have noticed him. He felt invisible to the Clan. Shadowpaw followed after the, his tail dragging across the forest floors. Sandstorm matched his pace and pitied him. He seemed to not have liked her and she felt like maybe it was her inexperience.

Dustpelt halted just outside Sandy Hollow. "You continue on with Shadowpaw. I want to get around the borders as quick as possible.

With the scents of ShadowClan and rogues coming so close to our borders makes me feel uneasy."

Sandstorm nodded, then turned to Shadowpaw. "Let's head up around here." She trekked alongside the hollow that led to the large oak tree. "This is where we usually go for the Gathering." She explained.

Shadowpaw pricked his ears. "You follow that path?" He pointed with his muzzle.

Sandstorm nodded. "Yes! The Gathering is in a few sunrises, so maybe you'll get to go."

Shadowpaw scoffed. "Yeah right." He hissed under his breath.

Sandstorm pretended that she didn't hear him. She flicked her tail, and she headed off towards the thunderpath. Shadowpaw followed her in silence and struggled to keep up. He felt relieved when Sandstorm finally stopped. Monsters roared ahead and their awful fumes stung Shadowpaw's nose. He wrinkled his muzzle and his eyes began to stream from pain.

"Those are monsters. They are dangerous." Sandstorm explained.

"It stings!" His nose was still scrunched. He tried to follow her, but he could barely see a few inches in front of him.

Sandstorm looked down at Shadowpaw with amusement. "Come on. It's getting late. I can teach you some hunting moves on the way back to camp."

Shadowpaw sighed with relief. Finally something he was wanting to do! He itched to get his paws on some prey and learn how to properly hunt.

Sandstorm followed the thunderpath up to Snake Rocks and looked around. "This should be an okay spot. Not too much prey, but it will help you in the long run."

Shadowpaw looked around. "Looks deserted." He mewed, straining to listen to any sounds of movement.

"It won't be once you learn how to find the scents." She glanced over across the thunderpath. "Now over here on the other side of that thunderpath is ShadowClan. They're always getting in our fur." She pointed with her tail.

Yes I know! He thought bitterly, but he bit back his tongue. Shadowpaw shuddered at the thought of living so close to the thunderpath, especially a busy one as this. Many monsters seemed to like this pathway. Where ever it led, it must be quite grand.

Sandstorm could feel his anxiety rising from the fumes, so she padded a little further into Snake Rocks, but dared not to go too far. "If we go much further, we'll run into snakes." She explained.

"Are they not edible?"

Sandstorm hissed at the thought of eating an adder. "Of course they are. It's the catching part that worries me!"

Shadowpaw purred with amusement. *Was she afraid of snakes? And if so, why? How dangerous were they?*

Chapter Twelve

"Rogues were scented in ThunderClan!" Yowled a tabby tom. Fireheart raced out into the clearing. His eyes wide with fear.

"Are they near camp?" Brindleface hissed, her eyes were narrow slits.

"No. They were found near Snake Rocks. The kits are safe." It was Whitestorm who spoke. Brindleface's fur flattened and she sighed with relief.

"Do we know who the rogues are?" Waterlily padded out of the medicine den, her tail plumped out with fear as well. *What if it was Tigerclaw?*

Fireheart glanced at the tom desperately. He too, feared who the rogues might be. "We can't be sure." The tabby tom meowed.

"Thank you, Longtail." Fireheart dipped his head.

"What's going on?" It was Bluestar. She jumped down from her den and padded into the middle of the clearing.

Fireheart hesitated to tell her what really did happen. She still fears Tigerclaw and it would only make her go crazy. He tried to figure out the right words, but nothing came to mind. The other warriors stayed silent as if they were leaving it all up to him.

"Fireheart." She meowed impatiently. "I am still your leader. I must know what is happening in my Clan."

"Rogues." He finally meowed.

Bluestar lifted her muzzle. Waterlily could tell, that was exactly what she feared. Bluestar's breath quickened. She then sighed deeply. "You four... follow Whitestorm and see if they are a threat." She ordered. "The rest of you, stay here in case we need you."

Whitestorm led the patrol up the ravine and out of camp. Waterlily twitched her tail nervously. If Tigerclaw is back and with even more help, they might not be able to recover this time.

Yellowfang padded out of the medicine den, and stood beside Waterlily. "Let's hope they don't put up a fight." She rasped. "ThunderClan is still recovering from the last fight."

"The Clan is ready." Retorted Waterlily. "It's Bluestar that isn't battle ready."

Yellowfang twitched her tail, impatiently. "She knows her own strength."

Waterlily disagreed, but stayed silent. It was better that the Clan thought that of her. If they knew how weak she really was, the Clan would fall without their leader. She did, however, expect that some might have already guessed her state of mind.

Yellowfang cut through her thoughts. "Let's get going on those herbs. I have a feeling this will not be an easy fight."

Waterlily nodded with agreement. She followed Yellowfang back into the medicine and they both sat in silence, picking apart the herbs. Yellowfang chewed up some comfrey roots and set them a mouse-length beside her.

***

"So, who were the rogues?" Waterlily prodded Fireheart as she attended to his wounds.

Fireheart winced in pain when Waterlily rubbed in some comfrey roots on his scratch. "We didn't know who they were." Fireheart paused. "I didn't recognize any of their scents. For sure, I thought Tigerclaw would have been among them."

"Still on about him?" Yellowfang padded into the den with some more comfrey leaves.

Fireheart scrambled to his paws and shook out his pelt. "He is out there, running free." He softly growled. "He should have been held

captive here, so we can keep an eye on him."

Waterlily placed her tail on his shoulder. "It seems the rogues put up a good fight."

"They could have been allies of Tigerclaw." Fireheart suggested.

"Or maybe they were just rogues looking for a fight." Yellowfang growled, clearly annoyed.

Waterlily shot her a stern glance. *Did she ever think before she spoke?* Waterlily softened her eyes and looked back at Fireheart. He looked worried and knew that Yellowfang was wrong. Waterlily knew it too. They could both feel that something is coming.

"We can talk about this later." Mewed Waterlily, narrowing her eyes at Yellowfang once more.

Fireheart dipped his head in thanks, then padded out of the den. He looked exhausted and Waterlily felt bad for him. He wanted so hard to prove to the Clan that he was a reliable deputy. Darkstripe and Longtail constantly jabbed at his kittypet blood and made Waterlily feel uneasy. She didn't interact with them much, and she was glad of that.

Yellowfang cut through her thoughts. "Go check on Bluestar and see how she is."

Waterlily padded up to Bluestar's den and announced herself as she neared it. Bluestar let out a faint mew of acceptance. Waterlily could tell just by her voice that she was also exhausted. She was tired from losing her eighth life, and was still recovering from Tigerclaw's treachories. She knew that Bluestar feared of Tigerclaw coming back.

"Do you have any scratches that need healing?" Waterlily mumbled through some comfrey and marigold leaves.

Bluestar shook her head slowly. "No, I am fine. Just mentally tired." She confessed.

Waterlily felt hot with embarrassment. She came up here, knowing

that Bluestar would be drained and would not want any company, but she had to get some answers from her. "Did you recognize any scents?" She dropped the herbs in front of Bluestar, knowing that she was too stubborn to accept help.

Bluestar shook her head again. "No. They were weak, like they had fought another Clan before us." Bluestar's mew was cracked from exhaustion.

Waterlily rounded her eyes. They looked as full as the moon on the night of the Gathering. "You think they did?" She bristled her fur.

"Perhaps."

Waterlily softly sighed. Bluestar was definitely too tired to talk any more. Bluestar curled down in her messy nest, and slowly closed her eyes. Waterlily dipped her head in respect, then quickly padded out of the den. Yellowfang was putting the last of the herbs in their places. She lifted her muzzle and seemed amazed.

"Did Bluestar accept your help for once?" She rasped, padding over to her nest that lay near the back of the den.

Waterlily yawned, then shook her head. "No. But she might apply some herself later. She did, however, give me some valuable information."

"Well, spit it out." Hissed Yellowfang.

"Bluestar says the rogues fought like had already been in battle with another Clan."

"That just means, they're weak."

Waterlily hissed with annoyance. "Do you not know anything of Tigerclaw?"

Yellowfang flinched from Waterlily's words. "Of course I do." She spat. "I just think that he might not really come back."

Waterlily rolled her eyes, then curled up in her messy nest on the other side of the small pond. She laid her head down on her paws.

Her eyes drooped with exhaustion. "I have come to the realization, that you don't understand the true ways of Tigerclaw and what all he is capable of doing."

Chapter Thirteen

Shadowpaw raced around Sandstorm and nipped her back leg. Sandstorm hissed, then leaped onto Shadowpaw, pinning him down. She raked her sheathed claws across his soft belly fur. Shadowpaw tried to kick her off, but she dug her claws into the ground. She was able to keep him down without much effort.

"Not too bad." She finally meowed, letting him back up to his paws.

Shadowpaw shook out his pelt. "What do you mean, *not too bad*?" He hissed. "I did terribly!"

Sandstorm wanted him to succeed, but he constantly pushed back on her praises. "I only praise you to keep up your strength." She admitted. "It'll help you in the long run."

Shadowpaw rolled his eyes in annoyance, then trudged after her as she padded back to camp. Sandstorm felt like a black rain cloud was stomping behind her. She quickened her pace, then ducked through the gorse tunnel. Shadowpaw ducked after her, then veered towards the medicine den.

"Shadowpaw!" She called out before he got to the medicine den.

Shadowpaw turned and blinked a few times before finally responding. "Yes, what is it?"

"The Gathering is tonight. Get some sleep. I'll ask Bluestar if you can go."

For once Shadowpaw seemed pleased with her words. "Thanks!" He called out, then bounded towards the medicine den. Waterlily was in the middle of counting some herbs. She was almost always counting. "What can I do for..." She lifted her muzzle and paused. "Shadowpaw. You were only out practicing battle skills. You shouldn't have any injuries."

"I don't." He mewed. "I just feel like I don't belong here."

Waterlily widened her eyes. "What do you mean?"

Shadowpaw couldn't meet her amber gaze. "Exactly that. Maybe I should have been left in the forest."

"Nonsense!" Waterlily hissed. "Now go. I have so much to do before the Gathering tonight."

Shadowpaw softly sighed then padded quietly out of the den. If Waterlily was too busy to speak with him, then he knew for sure that he was not meant to be here. He was about to try and sneak out of camp when Sandstorm trekked toward him. "Fireheart said you can go to the Gathering tonight."

Shadowpaw didn't feel honored, but he shook out the thoughts of not belonging and dipped his head in thanks. "Great. Should I get some sleep before it's time?" He knew that many warriors did rest before the great Gathering. Even though he wasn't tired, he thought it might do him some good.

Sandstorm nodded. "Yes, I can come wake you once it gets closer to the time." Then she bounded off towards Fireheart. Shadowpaw watched her leave, then padded to the apprentice den. His thoughts began to cloud his mind and he could barely concentrate on where he was heading.

"Watch where you're going, you big mouse-brain!" Hissed a familiar voice.

Shadowpaw quickly looked up and widened his eyes. "Sorry, Thornpaw." He didn't wait to see what Thornpaw's response would have been. He quickly padded to the apprentice den and laid down to sleep.

***

"Shadowpaw, wake up." A soft and pretty voice stirred in his dreams and he blinked open his eyes. Sandstorm stood a mouse-length away and tilted her head to the side. "You were sleeping pretty heavily. I could have swore you weren't breathing for a

moment."

Shadowpaw scrambled to his paws and tiredly followed Sandstorm to the middle of the clearing. They were the last to arrive. Bluestar remained in her den and Fireheart flicked his tail for them to go. "What about Bluestar?" Meowed Whitestorm.

"Bluestar is not well enough to go." He meowed, trying not to sound upset over her choice.

Once they all got to the Gathering place of fourtrees, Shadowpaw glanced around the crowd of cats. He has never seen so many cats in one place. "Go on. Talk to some of the other apprentices. But be careful not to say anything revealing." Sandstorm prompted then padded over to a group of WindClan cats.

Shadowpaw looked around and flattened his ears. Talking to other cats was his weakness and he felt alone more than ever. He looked around for Waterlily, but she was sitting by the medicine cats along with Yellowfang.

"Hi." Mewed a soft voice behind him. Shadowpaw turned around and saw a pair of pretty green eyes staring at him. He blinked a few times in confusion before responding.

"Uh... Hi." He finally mewed. His voice sounded hoarse.

"I'm Shadepaw."

Shadowpaw tilted his head to the side. It was a she-cat. She had black fur, but showed a dark gray in the moonlight. Her fur was glossy and thick. He cleared his throat before speaking. "I'm Shadowpaw." He finally meowed.

"You're from ThunderClan, aren't you?" Her voice was still soft.

Shadowpaw felt uneasy speaking to another Clan cat. *Did any of the other Clans know that he was a rogue before he joined ThunderClan?* He nodded his head slowly, suddenly aware that he was tongue-tied.

"I'm from RiverClan. You could probably tell already though." She

tilted her head slightly to the side. "You don't talk much, do you?"

Shadowpaw looked down at his paws. "Not really. I'm not used to it. I am generally alone."

"Well, now you've got a friend."

Shadowpaw felt a bit of butterflies in his stomach. He didn't know how to be friends with someone. Fernpaw and Ashpaw were good den mates, but they rarely speak to him now. He rounded his eyes and softly nodded. "Great!" He finally mewed. "But what do friends from different Clans do?"

"Not much, I suppose. I guess just talk at the Gathering. We can be Gathering buddies!" She exclaimed, happily purring.

"Let the meeting begin!" Yowled Crookedstar. Fireheart leaped up beside him and sat down. Shadowpaw turned his head and glanced around at the cat's reactions. All eyes were turned to Fireheart. Their eyes were filled with confusion.

"Bluestar couldn't be here tonight." Fireheart began. "So I am filling in her place this time."

Shadowpaw looked back up at Fireheart. He stopped listening and began thinking of the soft voice from Shadepaw. *We can be Gathering buddies!* He then felt like maybe he did belong. He just had the Gatherings to look forward to each and every time now.

Chapter Fourteen

Waterlily sat down and reluctantly counted poppy seeds. Yellowfang sat beside her and began tearing some marigold leaves for the elders. Fireheart padded into the den. His eyes wide with concern. Waterlily looked up and could instantly feel his worry. "What's wrong?"

Fireheart looked at Yellowfang and Waterlily then meowed, "Bluestar is refusing to go the Gathering."

"Did she say why?" Yellowfang rasped.

Fireheart shuffled his paws. "She says that she no longer believes in StarClan and that the Gatherings are pointless. It's like she's giving up on being leader."

Waterlily shook her head slowly. "She mustn't!" She paused for a quick moment and pleadingly looked at Yellowfang. "Could you try and talk to her?"

"If Fireheart cannot reason with her, then no one can."

Waterlily lowered her head in defeat. She knew that Yellowfang was right. Fireheart was closest to Bluestar. She trained him herself. "If Bluestar doesn't go to the Gathering, do we stay behind too?"

Yellowfang shook her head. "The Gathering must go on. Fireheart must take her place." She glanced up at Fireheart.

Fireheart shook his head slowly. "I...I can't."

Waterlily got to her paws and slightly narrowed her eyes. "You must!"

"How?"

Yellowfang dipped her head. "All you have to do is just speak from your heart. It'll feel weird, but it's what must be done."

Fireheart softly nodded then padded silently out of the den. Waterlily went back to counting her poppy seeds. She just finished and pushed those off to the side when an apprentice padded into the den. "What can I do for you..." Waterlily then looked up and saw it was Shadowpaw. He was just out training with Sandstorm. She glanced at his body, seeing no scratches or injuries on him. "Shadowpaw. You were just out practicing battle skills. You shouldn't have any injuries."

Shadowpaw shook his head. "I don't." He mewed. "I just feel like I don't belong here."

Waterlily widened her eyes. "What do you mean?" She could feel her heart beginning to race. *Did he really hate it here so much that he was thinking of leaving?* She shook her head softly and awaited his answer, hoping she was wrong.

"Exactly that. Maybe I should have been left in the forest." Came the unsatisfying answer. He looked down at his paws, not able to look her in the eyes.

Waterlily then looked at the piles of herbs that she still had to go through before the Gathering was to start. "Nonsense!" She hissed. "Now go. I have so much to do before the Gathering tonight."

Shadowpaw softly sighed then padded out of the den in silence. Waterlily looked back up at him and clouded her eyes with sadness. He was lonely and she made him leave. She could feel her stomach tighten in shame. Yellowfang nudged her. "It's not your fault. He has his own destiny."

Waterlily pushed herself to believe that Yellowfang was right, but she couldn't help but think maybe Yellowfang was wrong. *What if he really did think he didn't belong? Would he leave the Clan life?*

"Finish up these herbs, then take a rest. You'll need your strength for the Gathering." Ordered Yellowfang, taking the last of the pile near her to the herb store.

Waterlily reluctantly nodded and continued counting the stock of catchweed they had.

***

Fireheart leaped up onto the large tree trunk next to Crookedstar. His eyes gleamed with fear. He took a deep breath and meowed, "Bluestar couldn't be here tonight. So I am filling in her place this time."

All eyes turned to him. There was a mix of amusement and concern within the crowd of cats. Waterlily could sense fear in his voice, but she stayed calm. Fireheart met her amber gaze and softly nodded, willing him to go on.

Fireheart raised his head high and began speaking like he was truly their leader. "ThunderClan is doing alright. We have a new apprentice this Gathering." He glanced around the crowd of cats. "Shadowpaw." He finished.

Shadowpaw blinked in confusion a few times then dipped his head. Waterlily could tell that he was not paying attention. He was distracted from something, but she didn't dwell on it.

"Shadowpaw! Shadowpaw!" Called out the Clan cats.

Shadowpaw looked around, awkwardly. Fireheart then continued. "That is all for ThunderClan." He mewed when the murmurs died down.

Crookedstar then stepped forward. He glanced over at Fireheart. "We are very interested in what happened to Bluestar." He meowed.

Fireheart shook his head. "She is fine. I can promise you that." He retorted, rather quickly. He looked over at Whitestorm who nodded his head approvingly.

Crookedstar didn't look satisfied with Fireheart's answer, but he continued, looking back at the Clans. "RiverClan is also doing alright. There is nothing else to report.

Nightstar, still frail, took a small step forward. "ShadowClan has nothing to report." He meowed, hoarsely.

Waterlily tilted her head to the side. Nightstar almost always had

something to say. *Was he hiding something?* She studied him for a bit and noticed that he did look stronger than the last Gathering, but he was still very weak. She could see his paws trembling. She guessed that he just wanted this Gathering to be over.

Tallstar then lifted his muzzle and took a pace forward. "We can end the Gathering then. I also have nothing to report. All is well."

With a few nods of agreement from the other leaders, the black-and-white tom leaped down from the trunk. Fireheart leaped after him. Nightstar scrambled down awkwardly, but quickly recovered in hopes not many cats saw him. *For once, a Gathering that went smoothly.*

Yellowfang flicked her tail and Waterlily followed. She glanced over at Shadowpaw and saw him looking at the RiverClan she-cat. She tilted her head slightly to the side and watched as he said goodbye and padded after his Clan. Waterlily could then feel a pang of sympathy for the young tom. She followed Yellowfang deep in thought. *What if he befriended a RiverClan cat? Is that really so bad?*

Chapter Fifteen

Sandstorm nodded her head slowly. "Good form. Now work on keeping your tail still."

Shadowpaw held in his anger by closing his eyes tightly. Sandstorm drove him crazy by telling him what to do so much. He knew how to hunt. He was good at it. So why did she have to act like he was just a kit? He opened his eyes, took a deep breath then slapped his tail on the soft grass. He glanced around the forest in search of prey. Almost nothing wanted to venture out.

"It doesn't seem like anything is here. We can try over by Sunningrocks." She offered.

Shadowpaw hissed and shook his head. "No. I can do this. I know something will show. I'm not giving up!"

Sandstorm flinched at his words. Why did he have to be so hostile towards her? She shook her head as if to clear it. She stayed silent and let him do his thing. She dared not to start a fight so early in the day.

When it seemed like all hope was going to be lost, Shadowpaw suddenly lifted his muzzle and tasted the air. He could smell vole! He glanced around, hoping it wasn't too far. To his relief, it was just a few fox-lengths ahead. It was chewing on some sort of nut. He crept slowly toward it. A stick crunched below him and the vole darted for a hole not too far. "Mouse-dung!" He spat, and stomped his foot.

"It might come out again." Sandstorm urged him on.

Shadowpaw swiftly nodded and stared down at the hole a few fox-lengths away. Just when Shadowpaw began getting tired of crouching, the vole did come back out. It was completely unaware of him there. He stayed still and silent until the vole came a little

closer. He narrowed his eyes, leaped and caught the vole between his paws. He swiftly bit its neck and closed his eyes to thank StarClan for his prey.

"Great job!" She praised.

"Voles are Waterlily's favorite. So I might give this one to her, if I can?"

Sandstorm nodded. "Of course. But we must catch a few more for the elders."

Shadowpaw bounded after Sandstorm and they padded down the pathway to Sunningrocks. The prey would more likely venture there. She stopped and let Shadowpaw do the work while she watched his form. He crouched down and sniffed the air. Lots of prey scent was here. He could smell squirrel, mouse and rabbit. He scanned the clearing, in hopes to find the rabbit. If he was fast enough to catch a rabbit, he would be praised for sure by his Clan.

Suddenly he spotted it. It sat just by the river. He crept slowly toward it. It scratched his ear, still unaware of Shadowpaw getting closer. Sandstorm watched intently. She was the queen of getting rabbit, but Shadowpaw did not know that. She let him try before she would interfere.

He leaped into the air, but the rabbit was too fast and hopped almost right into Sandstorm. Sandstorm slapped down her forepaw and killed it swiftly with the bite to the neck. "You did good!" She exclaimed.

"Not good enough." He quickly retorted. "Looks like you got my prize."

Sandstorm shook her head. "It was a team effort. That's what being in a Clan is about. We will always help one another."

Shadowpaw for once felt like she really wasn't out to get him. He thought of all the times she praised him. And all he would do, is be rude to her, thinking that she didn't like him. He shook his head to clear it. He hung his head low and shuffled his paws. "I'm sorry,

Sandstorm." He meowed softly.

Sandstorm tilted her head to the side. "What for?"

Shadowpaw looked up at her with wide eyes. Did she really not see how mean he was to her? "I am sorry for all the times I don't listen to you, or talk back to you." He paused for a quick moment. "And all you ever do is just be nice to me. I was so used to the Clan ignoring me, I had assumed that you didn't like me..."

Sandstorm padded over to him and placed her tail over his flank. "I know." She purred. "Fireheart was in the same position."

"He was?" He was now really curious about their deputy. "How?"

"He was a kittypet, as you know. Dustpelt and I were very mean to him for it. I regret every part of it. He is such a loyal warrior. He would die for us in an instance. And I would do the same for him."

Shadowpaw now realized that she was not only speaking of how she regrets her judgement of him, but how much she now loved him. She was in love with the deputy!

"Does Fireheart feel the same?" He finally mewed.

Sandstorm reluctantly shrugged. "I do not know. He doesn't show any signs." She paused. "How did you know that I...."

Shadowpaw lifted his paw to stop her. "I could just sense it from how you were speaking about him. It's the same way Waterlily..." He quickly stopped himself. He shook his head and hesitated to say the rest. He dared not to let out Waterlily's secrets.

"The same way as Waterlily?" Sandstorm tilted her head to the side. She sensed that he didn't want to say anything more. "If you wish to tell me, I won't let out her secret." She dipped her head.

Shadowpaw felt more respect for the she-cat. He felt like she was becoming his friend along with his mentor. "Promise?"

Sandstorm nodded. "Of course. You have my word."

"The same way she looks at Littlecloud." He finally mewed softly.

Sandstorm widened her eyes, but didn't prod for anymore details. Shadowpaw was relieved that she didn't ask anymore questions. That was all he knew. At least from what he saw. "Come on. We should get going back to camp. I can teach you some battle moves later today."

Shadowpaw yawned and nodded his head slowly in agreement. His mind felt exhausted. He followed close behind her as they padded back into camp. He glanced over the medicine den. He padded over to Waterlily. She just finished up sorting some kind of herb when he reached her. "What's up?" She mewed, looking up at him, concerned.

"I just wanted to tell you about my day." He meowed softly.

Waterlily sat down and wrapped her tail over her front paws. "I'd love to hear about it."

Shadowpaw mimicked her position and purred softly. He felt like things were finally coming together. He was finally apart of the Clan and no longer an outsider, no matter what anyone else said.

Chapter Sixteen

Runningwind's body lay in the center of the clearing. Waterlily stood over him, her eyes closed tightly. He was her previous mentor and she couldn't help but feel regret. She didn't blame herself for his death, but he could have at least had an apprentice become a warrior. Instead, Waterlily became a medicine cat.

Bluestar paced around his sprawled out body. She softly muttered to herself, showing her distress of the dead warrior. Waterlily longed to calm her down, but this seemed to be the last straw for her. She was going crazy in the middle of the clearing with almost all the Clan cats staring at her in dismay.

Waterlily bowed her head and closed her eyes tightly for a few moments, then padded back to the crowd of cats, letting someone mourn over him next. Fireheart padded up to her. "Bluestar should be left alone." He mewed softly.

Waterlily shook her head. "No. She has had plenty of time to get back to her regular self. She needs to lead the Clan."

Fireheart flinched at her words. "Is it that obvious?"

"Yes. The Clan is worried for her. Today made it more known to those who haven't noticed. Once the vigil is done for Runningwind, I can go talk to her." She offered.

Fireheart nodded in agreement. "I'll go with you."

Waterlily padded back into the medicine den. Yellowfang was putting the last of the herbs away. She lifted her muzzle and turned to Waterlily. "How is she?"

Waterlily didn't even want to answer. She just looked up at Yellowfang with sad and concerned eyes. And with that, Yellowfang knew Bluestar was not doing well. She picked up some poppy seeds and dropped them in front of Waterlily. "Will you take these to

her?" Waterlily nodded silently and Yellowfang then continued. "Were you able to pay your respects to Runningwind?"

Waterlily nodded again, then yawned from exhaustion. "Yes." She softly mewed.

The vigil would take almost all night, so Waterlily curled up in her nest to sleep. She would speak to Bluestar in the morning. She closed her eyes slowly and drifted to sleep.

***

"Waterlily." Mewed a voice, piercing through her dream. Waterlily blinked open her eyes and saw an orange tom standing just outside the medicine den. "Come on!"

Waterlily quickly scrambled to her paws and stretched out her forepaws. She then tiredly followed Fireheart to Bluestar's den. He announced their names and a small mew came from inside the den. She sounded weak. Fireheart entered first dipped his head to the old leader. Waterlily padded in behind him and sat down a tail-length in front of Bluestar.

"What brings the two of you here?" She meowed hoarsely.

Waterlily could tell that she suspected something, but she didn't let it get to her head. She dropped the poppy seeds in front of Bluestar. "You need these. Eat them now." She wasted no time with her.

Fireheart glanced over at her, shocked that she would speak to her leader that way. Bluestar narrowed her eyes, but lapped up the poppies. "Happy?" She finally mewed, swiping her tongue over her lips.

Waterlily dipped her head. "Good. Once you're rested up, get it together and lead the Clan." She softly hissed.

Bluestar narrowed her eyes even more. "I am your leader and I am doing the best I can." She growled, bristling her fur.

Fireheart sat down silently, not knowing what to say. Waterlily lashed her tail and fluffed out her fur. "You are not acting as our

leader. We need you to stay strong for the Clan. As a Clan, we are falling apart when you're not around."

Bluestar flattened her fur and softened her eyes. She sat silently, deep in thought. Waterlily prodded her mind, wondering what Bluestar was thinking, but all she could sense was just sadness. Bluestar then dipped her head low. "I know I haven't been out of my den as of late." She looked back up at Waterlily with sad eyes. "I'm sorry." Was all she could say.

Waterlily knew at that point, it was going to take a miracle for Bluestar to go back to normal. She softly sighed then nodded her head slowly. "Alright." She mewed then turned to go out of the den. Fireheart remained sitting, not knowing if he should stay with Bluestar or follow Waterlily. Waterlily then flicked her tail and Fireheart bounded to her side.

When they got out of the den, Fireheart leaned in close to Waterlily. "That didn't go well." He whispered.

Waterlily sat down with a thud in the middle of the clearing. "She has gone through a lot. More than most leaders. However, she is our leader and she needs to lead our Clan. I'm afraid it might be too late once she does get it together."

Fireheart pressed himself against her in comfort. "Tigerclaw will stop at nothing to get revenge on the Clan."

"Yes, you're right. I'm sure Bluestar blames herself for it. We must make her understand that Tigerclaw is in it for power." Waterlily kept her head low.

Fireheart placed his tail over her shoulder. "We'll think of something to convince her." He mewed. Just as he was about to head back to the warriors den, a familiar scent tickled his nose. He pricked his ears and whirled around, as if hoping to see a friend he longed to see.

Waterlily turned to see Fireheart's gaze locked onto a black tom padding into ThunderClan camp. She lifted her muzzle to see if she could recognize the scent of Graystripe, but it was a different scent.

It smelled of ThunderClan, but of a rogue as well. She flattened her ears. "What do you smell?"

Fireheart trembled for a moment then raced to the edge of the clearing when the shadow of a cat emerged into the sun. It was Ravenpaw! He rubbed his whiskers against Ravenpaw's cheek. Waterlily raced over behind him and dipped her head at the black tom. He was no longer scrawny and frail. He was now well fed and his ribs were no longer visible

"What are you doing here?" Meowed Fireheart.

Ravenpaw dipped his head to the two cats and other warriors began to emerge from their dens, recognizing the former apprentice of ThunderClan. Ravenpaw glanced around, but tried to hide his uneasiness. To his knowledge, Tigerclaw was still deputy. Perhaps that's what was best for him to know. After all, Tigerclaw did want to kill Ravenpaw for knowing his treacheries.

Waterlily watched Fireheart get acquainted again with his old friend. Sandstorm padded beside him. Ravenpaw looked at the sandy-colored she-cat and purred joyfully. "Sandpaw!" He exclaimed.

"Sandstorm, actually." She corrected him, proudly.

"And how is Dustpaw doing?"

"It's Dustpelt. I became a warrior when Sandstorm did." It was Dustpelt who answered as he padded over to the sleek black tom.

Ravenpaw then looked at Waterlily. "You were training as a medicine cat, weren't you?"

Waterlily nodded. "Yes. I am now Waterlily." She purred.

Waterlily searched the tom for any signs of regret, but he seemed content with his life as a loner. She then realized, as much as she loved the reunion with their old friend, she knew he wasn't here to just chat and catch up. "What brings you here." She finally meowed when there was a small break.

Ravenpaw glanced over at Waterlily. He must have caught on her knowing he came here for a reason. Ravenpaw flicked his tail uneasily. "I spoke to a cat that I never met before that now lives at the edge of my territory. He smelled of ThunderClan, but said that he was living with the twolegs. He seemed to be lost, so I took him back over there."

"Are you sure he was ThunderClan?" Mewed Sandstorm, tilting her head.

Ravenpaw nodded. "I may have left the clan life, but I still remember the scent of ThunderClan." He spoke soft, but Waterlily could feel a bit of edge to his tone of voice.

"What did he look like?" It was Fireheart who spoke up. His eyes were wide with concern.

"Like a white cloud."

Chapter Seventeen

"Cloudpaw!" Exclaimed Fireheart. Sandstorm exchanged the same worried glance with Fireheart. Then she turned her green gaze back to Ravenpaw. "Did he look happy to return?"

Ravenpaw shook his head. "He seemed quite sad to return to his den."

"Is that why you came here?" Meowed Waterlily.

Ravenpaw nodded his head. "Yes. I suspected that he might actually be a Clan cat."

Waterlily glanced at Fireheart. Fireheart seemed just as lost. "We should go rescue him!" He finally meowed.

Sandstorm hissed with frustration. "Ravenpaw has only seen Cloudpaw once." She turned back to him. "Were you sure that he was sad?"

Ravenpaw shrugged. "I couldn't fully tell. He was eating kittypet food."

Waterlily could feel Fireheart tense his muscles. Sandstorm then took a small step forward. "See, he might actually be happy. Are you sure a rescue would be right?"

Fireheart shook his head. "I don't know, Sandstorm. I just wanted him to be happy here in the Clan life, like I was."

"I agree with Sandstorm." Mewed Waterlily. "He chose to keep going back even after you told him to choose where his loyalty lies."

Fireheart looked up at her with wide eyes. That was not what he wanted to hear. He knew she might be right, but he did not want to believe that. "No. Not true. Sandstorm, come with me. Ravenpaw, will you come with us?"

Ravenpaw nodded. And the three cats bounded out of camp. Waterlily shook her head slowly as she watched them leave. Yellowfang padded up to her and hissed softly in Waterlily's ear. "Fireheart is gonna be the death of me."

Waterlily mewed in amusement and agreement. "Come on. Cloudpaw may be hurt when they bring him back. I'll make sure we have some comfry."

"You went out yesterday to gather some. We should have plenty." Yellowfang rasped. She trotted to the medicine den and flicked her tail towards the pile of comfrey Waterlily had gathered.

Waterlily felt hot with embarrassment. She didn't remember going out and getting those herbs. But luckily she didn't have to go out again. For once, she wanted to stay in camp.

***

Waterlily woke up with a startle and peeked outside of the medicine den. There was still no sign of Fireheart and Sandstorm. "They're not back yet. Did they get captured as well?" She sniffed the air one more time, not wanting that to be true.

"They're fine." It was Yellowfang. She padded beside her and her eyes were filled with worry, though she tried to hide it.

Waterlily felt that she expected them to be back as well. "Should we tell Bluestar?"

Yellowfang shook her head slowly. "No. It must be up to Fireheart to tell her about Cloudpaw. Wait until sunrise to let her know something may be..." She was cut off by the yowling sounds of cats outside in the clearing. Waterlily raced out of the den and pricked her ears. It was Fireheart! He returned with Cloudpaw! She raced towards him and checked him over for any scratches, along with Cloudpaw and Sandstorm. Luckily no one hurt.

"You're exhausted Fireheart. You need rest." She insisted.

"Thank you, Waterlily. But I must assemble the patrols for today. I already missed too much."

Waterlily shook her head slowly and laid her tail over his flank. "At least sleep for a little bit. Whitestorm can assign the patrols until sunrise."

Fireheart sighed then nodded his head. "Alright." He mewed, dipping his head. He knew better than to fight with her.

Yellowfang padded out with some poppy seeds in her jaws. "You probably don't need these, but just in case any bad dreams come to you." She dropped them in front of Fireheart and Sandstorm. "Cloudpaw may have a few if he desires, but do not exceed more than one." She glanced over at the fluffy, white tom.

His eyes were wide with fear, but he was glad to be back to the Clans. Waterlily turned to Fireheart. "You should tell Bluestar what has happened."

Fireheart softly narrowed his eyes. "Will you come with me?"

Waterlily tilted her head to the side and slightly glanced at Sandstorm. She could feel some sort of anger coming from her way. *Did she think Fireheart loved her? Surely she knew that Waterlily could never fall in love?* She shook her head as if to clear it. "Yeah." She paused and glanced back at Sandstorm. "Can she come along as well?" She flicked her tail towards her.

Fireheart turned his head to look at Sandstorm and softly purred. "Of course she can."

Sandstorm softed her gaze and had a bit of amusement in her eyes. Waterlily followed the two warriors into Bluestar's den. Fireheart announced himself and the others. Bluestar was silent, but Fireheart padded inside first. He peered through the cave and saw Bluestar curled up in her messy nest. He flattened his ears and wanted to hiss out her name, but he hesitated, then softly mewed. "Bluestar. Can we speak with you?"

Bluestar lifted her muzzle and pricked her ears in alarm. "I suppose." She sounded exhausted.

Waterlily sat beside Fireheart, and Sandstorm sat on the other side.

Fireheart wrapped his tail over his front paws and began speaking. "Cloudpaw was missing, but we found him in the twoleg's den. He was captured by the twolegs..."

Bluestar then cut him off, clearly concerned for him. "Cloudpaw chose to go to the twoleg gardens, didn't he?"

Fireheart softly nodded.

"Why did he come back?"

Fireheart flinched at her words. Did she not want him to come back? "He wanted to." He didn't know what to say. "Can he come back?" His words were slow, like he didn't want to bother asking her.

"Of course. But you know very well that he can't have a paw in both worlds. You know that above all."

"He's a great and loyal..." Sandstorm was then cut off by Fireheart.

Fireheart lifted his tail to silence Sandstorm, then dipped his head to Bluestar. "I do. Thanks."

Bluestar then lifted her muzzle with curiosity as she sat up and mickied Fireheart's position. "Now tell me. How did you know where to find him?"

Fireheart looked at Sandstorm, then back at Bluestar. "Ravenpaw helped us. He said that he..."

"Ravenpaw?" Bluestar tilted her head to the side, clearly confused.

"Tigerclaw's apprentice."

Bluestar widened her eyes in alarm as if she was having memories and flashbacks of the treacherous Tigerclaw. Fireheart touched the tip of his tail to her should to help get back to real life. "He is not here. But Ravenpaw helped us find him. He saw him there and came to help us."

Bluestar shook her head to clear it and blinked blanky at Fireheart.

"Found who where?"

Fireheart softly sighed at the state Bluestar was in. She was too tired to remember anything. Her eyes were clouded as if she didn't sleep for moons. Waterlily then tilted her head to the side and prodded Bluestar's thoughts, while Fireheart sat in silence with his head bowed. She could sense a pang of pain and regret in the leader's gaze. She then found fear and shame. She didn't blame Bluestar for feeling this way, but for how long will she let this go on?

Chapter Eighteen

Waterlily scrambled to her feet and lifted her muzzle to taste the air. The air smelled of powerful fumes Waterlily did not recognize. Fireheart then raced out into the clearing and yowled as loud as he could. "Fire! Everyone out! There's a fire!"

Warriors shot up and sprinted after Fireheart as he led them out of camp. Waterlily prodded Yellowfang as she silently slept in the corner of the den. "Psst. Yellowfang. Get up! You must get up!"

Yellowfang opened her eyes slowly and quickly scrambled to her feet. "What's going on? What's that smell?"

"Fire. We must get going. Go on and follow Fireheart. I'll get Bluestar."

Yellowfang dipped her head and sprinted after the Clan. Waterlily ran up to where Bluestar laid. She was wide awake as Waterlily approached her. She looked weak and full of fear. "Please, Bluestar, you must follow me." She pleaded.

Bluestar nodded her head and for once obeyed her medicine cat. "Lead the way."

Waterlily flicked her tail and they both raced into the clearing and she saw Fireheart heading up the ravine. She trotted after him and the warriors. Smoke was everywhere around them now and Waterlily could feel her lungs beginning to collapse from the powerful fumes. She gasped, trying to catch her breath, but she pushed through and kept in pace with Bluestar. Fireheart raced through Sunningrocks. Fireheart halted just before he crossed. "Is anyone missing?" His voice rang out hoarsely through the smoke.

"Bramblekit! Where's my kit?" Hissed Goldenflower.

"Halftail and Patchpelt is missing too!" It was Cloudpaw. He shot up

to his paws and searched around.

"They must still be in camp." Mewed Waterlily.

"I'll find them!" Fireheart then glanced across the crowd of cats.

"I'll go with you." Rasped Yellowfang.

"No!" Waterlily spat. "I won't let..."

"I may be old, but I can do this. You are younger and have more life."

"No, Yellowfang. What if you never come back?"

"I will." She touched her forehead to Waterlily's cheeks and closed her eyes tightly. "I promise."

Waterlily then dipped her head in agreement and they both raced back into the fire. Whitestorm lifted his tail and led the warriors across the river. Waterlily longed to race after them, but she reluctantly followed Whitestorm and trudged into the water. She shrieked from the cold, but forced herself to push through.

Waterlily scrambled up the side of the river and shook out her fur vigorously, making the water droplets splatter everywhere. Bluestar heavily sat down near the edge of the river and lowered her head as if she was trying to sleep in a sitting position. Whitestorm sat next to her and licked his chest fur in quick motions. Longtail and Darkstripe sat a few tail-lengths ahead and fluffed out their fur in hopes they would dry quickly.

"Where did Fireheart go?" Mewed a soft voice.

Waterlily turned to see Cinderpelt limping a bit towards her. "He went back to fetch the elders and a kit that was accidently left behind." She paused for a quick moment, seeing Cinderpelt halt and lift up her leg. "What's wrong with your leg?"

"I might have used it too hard while swimming." She confessed.

"I'll have to look at it once we're able to get you to a medicine den.

Perhaps RiverClan would be willing to let me treat you."

"No!" It was Bluestar who yowled. "No one is going into RiverClan. We are to stay here."

Waterlily wanted to bite the tongue off Bluestar. They need RiverClan's help and she would refuse it if they asked. But she kept her mouth closed and she just dipped her head in return. "Very well." She murmured.

Waterlily sat watching the horizon, waiting for Fireheart and Yellowfang to return. It seemed like too much time had passed. She began to get worried, but then she saw two head pop up from out of the gorse tunnel. Fireheart returned with a kit in his jaws and Halftail was dragging a lifeless body. Waterlily's eyes clouded with pain as she saw the elder carrying a familiar body. Patchpelt was dead, but he was at least with the Clan so they can pay their respects and bury him.

Fireheart let the kit scramble to his mom, and Goldenflower dipped her head in return. "Thank you, Fireheart, for saving my dear Bramblekit." She purred, brushing against him.

Rain began to pour down on them and Fireheart looked up at silverpelt. "Rain will drown out the fire. We can go back once it goes down."

Waterlily raced up to Fireheart. "Where's Yellowfang?" She glanced around Fireheart hoping that she shows up somehow behind him.

Fireheart hesitated to answer her. He lowered his head in shame. "I...I... I couldn't save her. Bramblekit was hanging on a tree and I could only save one." He stuttered.

Waterlily closed her eyes tightly, but resisted the urge to cry and yowl like a lost kit. "It's okay. I understand." She meowed softly.

"Is that everyone?" Mewed a familiar voice. It was Leopardfur, the deputy of RiverClan.

Fireheart dipped his head to the old she-cat. "Yes. This is everyone."

"What about that one?" She pointed with her muzzle across the river. A lifeless body laid just beside the river.

"He is dead." Mewed Waterlily padding up to Leopardfur.

"I am sorry to hear that. Would you like me to get him?" Her voice was calm and slow. But before Fireheart or anyone else could answer she slipped into the river and swam gracefully across. She grasped Patchpelt's limp body and swam across back into RiverClan territory. She sides heaved heavily, but she showed no signs of weakness when she dropped his down in front of Fireheart. "I can take you back to camp to bury him."

"In RiverClan?" He tilted his head to the side.

"Would you rather he lay here alone until the fire dies out?" Her calming voice turned cold and raspy. Fireheart didn't answer. "Come on. I'll show you the way to camp where you'll be safe."

Waterlily glanced at Bluestar. She was hostile towards them when she mentioned going to the medicine den. *Would she deny their help, still?* Bluestar reluctantly followed Leopardfur and her Clan into camp. Waterlily followed close behind and sighed with relief that ShadowClan was not on the other side of the river. Seeing Littlecloud now was the last thing she wanted when Yellowfang suspects something going on. Then she remembered that Yellowfang was not beside her like she normally was. For all she knew, Yellowfang was dead.

Chapter Nineteen

Fireheart padded slowly up to Waterlily who was curled up beside Cinderpelt; both of them were sleeping peacefully. He softly prodded her side with his forepaw, hoping not to wake Cinderpelt. Waterlily blinked open her eyes in surprise, the relaxed once she saw it was Fireheart. She yawned then mewed. "What is it?"

"Can you come with me to ThunderClan and see if the fire has gone down?" His mew was tense, but he tried to stay calm and steady. "I would like Graystripe to come with us as well."

Graystripe stood beside him and dipped his head to the medicine she-cat. "Thank you, Waterlily. For all that you could do, to save my kits."

Waterlily couldn't help but feel hot with embarrassment. It has been a while since she thought of Graystripe's mate, Silverstream. She was able to save the kits, but not the silver queen. She died giving birth. Waterlily's eyes clouded with sorrow as she looked up at Graystripe. She couldn't bring herself to speak.

Cloudpaw then padded up to them. "Can I come?" He whispered.

Fireheart shook his head. "No. Stay here."

"Please?" he pleaded. "I'll do everything you say!"

"Then stay here and help Whitestorm. Will you let him and Bluestar know that we will be back by moonrise?"

Cloudpaw nodded his head slowly and lowered his head in sadness. Waterlily couldn't help but feel bad for the fluffy kitten. He was only wanting to help. But she suspected that Fireheart only wanted a few to come with him in case the fire and smoke was still too potent and dangerous. Waterlily followed him in silence across the bridge and back into ThunderClan territory. Graystripe walked beside Fireheart and their pelts almost touched. Waterlily looked

around and her eyes burned from the smoke, but there was no more fire.

The earth seemed gray and gloomy as they padded into the familiar grounds of their camp. The dens were turned to ash and looked like piles of nothingness. The only thing that was left standing, was the medicine den and Bluestar's den. Waterlily raced inside the medicine den in hopes to find the herb store well stocked, but everything was gone. The fire had gulped it all up and left nothing behind.

"Did you find Yellowfang yet?" Fireheart mewed, peering into the medicine den.

Waterlily shook her head slowly, then padded over to him. "The fire has ruined everything. We'll have to rebuild it all again."

"But water has also saved us. It could have been worse." Fireheart admitted.

Graystripe took a pace forward. "Fireheart is right. It could have been a lot worse."

Waterlily didn't want to hear what all could go wrong. She silently padded between the two warriors and headed towards the ravine and looked around for Yellowfang. Her heart sank as she saw a bit of a gray tail just underneath a large tree. She raced towards it. Then as she neared, she slowed down, in hopes to find Yellowfang still alive.

Yellowfang made a pitiful coughing sound and she gasped for air. Waterlily padded to her side and nudged her cheek. "I'm glad you're okay."

"Not for long." Yellowfang rasped. She coughed in between each word.

Waterlily took a small pace backwards. "What do you mean?" Her voice almost cracked as if she knew what Yellowfang was about to say next.

"I am too weak to move. I'm old, Waterlily. You will be a great

medicine cat. No matter what you think, *you are* a gifted medicine cat." Yellowfang croaked out the words as best as she could, then gasped for air again.

Fireheart raced to her side and licked her forehead like a mother would to their kit. "Yellowfang, I can help you."

"Don't bother. Fireheart, there is something you must know. Brokentail was my..."

"Your son. I know. I accidentally overheard when you were speaking to him and Waterlily."

Yellowfang twitched her ear with amusement. "I will be watching over you in StarClan... my old friends." She then took her last breath and her eyes clouded to black. She was dead.

Waterlily shook her head. "No. No! Please, Yellowfang. You can't do this! Not now. I've already lost so much." She crouched down and pressed her forehead against Yellowfang's flank. Her body was already beginning to grow cold. She cried in silence, then backed away, letting Fireheart and Graystripe pay their respects to the old she-cat.

"Let's bury her." Mewed Fireheart. Waterlily nodded silently, and followed Graystripe and Fireheart to the burying place. The two warriors set Yellowfang down and bowed their heads in respect before properly covering her up with dirt.

"I will see you in StarClan, Yellowfang - my mentor, my elder, my friend." She closed her eyes tightly and let the memories sweep over her. She softly purred at the memories that danced in her head. She remembered how Yellowfang was impatient with her, but praised her nonetheless. She then remembered how Yellowfang was not as weak as she thought when it came to battle training.

Fireheart then interrupted her thoughts. "Come on. We should get going back to the Clan. It's almost moon high."

Waterlily clouded her eyes with pain, then dipped her head in respect.

"She will be greatly remembered." Meowed Graystripe, calmingly.

As they neared the others that stood awkwardly around in RiverClan camp, Fireheart told them all what had happened.

"StarClan told me that fire would save the Clan." Hissed Bluestar once Fireheart had finished speaking. "But it has destroyed us instead."

"No. It hasn't. I won't let that happen." Fireheart tried to encourage her.

"ThunderClan will return home tonight." Bluestar decided in a voice like ice. Waterlily kept silent and watched as Bluestar flicked her tail to the Clan. "We are to leave now. We are only strangers here."

"But the camp is ruined!" Protested Graystripe.

"No matter. We will rebuild it."

Waterlily sighed with relief. Their leader was finally back and had the determination they needed long ago. "Then lead the way, Bluestar." She purred, standing straighter.

Bluestar dipped her head, then padded to the RiverClan's camp border.

Graystripe then raced over to her side. "Wait!" He yowled. "Let me accompany you back to ThunderClan."

"We don't need an escort." Retorted Bluestar. She quickly turned her head towards him and her eyes narrowed to slits. "You chose to stay with your kits. You must live with the decision you made." Bluestar must have known why he was asking to come back with them.

Waterlily flinched at her words. Was she really not going to let him rejoin ThunderClan? She tilted her head in intently listened what Graystripe would do next. The other warriors around her did the same, all shocked on Bluestar's hostile tone.

Very well." Graystripe dipped his head and sat down. He watched in silence and disappointment as his former Clan left camp. Waterlily

nodded her head to the gray warrior and waited for Fireheart to say goodbye to his old friend. Fireheart then padded over to Waterlily and they both fell in beside one another, following their Clan back to their own camp.

"Don't blame Bluestar for her harsh words. She just wants to make sure Graystripe doesn't do the same as she once did." Mewed Waterlily, trying to comfort him.

"I know. I just wish that he chose to stay here."

Waterlily nodded slowly in agreement, then pressed herself closer to Fireheart, trying to keep her friend comforted. Fireheart then trekked faster to catch up with Bluestar in the front of the Clan. Waterlily stayed behind the Clan and her eyes clouded with sorrow. She didn't have anyone to go home to. Spottedleaf is gone. And now Yellowfang is gone. She was alone and she felt very much alone.

Chapter Twenty

Shadowpaw padded into the nursery and looked around. The walls were finally up and looked great, but very different from when he was in here. He glanced around, remembering how the nursery used to be.

As he looked around, memories flooded his mind of the old nursery, where he had spent many cozy nights as a kit. The old nursery had been warm and inviting, with soft moss and feathers lining the den.

Determined to make things right, Shadowpaw set to work. He gathered up a bundle of feathers and moss and began to arrange them in a cozy nest in the corner of the den. Next, he found some thick strands of ivy and wove them into a curtain that could be drawn across the entrance to the nursery, providing some privacy for the nursing queens and their kits. Finally, he added some finishing touches to the den, including a small pile of twigs and leaves for the kits to play with.

Frostfur then padded up to him. "The nursery looks beautiful. Just like how it was before."

Sandstorm then padded up beside him. "Take a break and come hunting with me." She mewed softly, nudging his shoulder.

Shadowpaw nodded his head and touched his forehead to Frostfur before following Sandstorm out of camp.

The camp finally started looking like it should. The Clan worked hard to get it back in order and everyone was exhausted. Shadowpaw was then determined to catch enough prey for the whole Clan tonight.

Shadowpaw followed Sandstorm to the Great Oak tree. "There should be some prey around here." Meowed Sandstorm, sitting down to observe her apprentice.

Shadowpaw prowled through the forest, his green eyes scanning the trees for any sign of movement. He noticed a squirrel leaping from tree to tree in the distance. He tensed, ready to chase after it, but Sandstorm put a paw on his shoulder.

"Wait." She said. "You're fast, but squirrels are tricky. They'll lead you on a wild chase if you're not careful."

Shadowpaw nodded, listening intently. Sandstorm had a reputation as one of the best hunters in the Clan, and he knew that he had a lot to learn from her.

"What should I do, then?" He asked.

Sandstorm's eyes gleamed. "You climb the tree."

Shadowpaw's heart leapt into his throat. He'd never climbed a tree before, let alone chased prey up one. But he trusted Sandstorm, and he knew that he had to push himself if he wanted to succeed as a warrior. With a deep breath, Shadowpaw began to climb. The bark was rough under his paws, but he focused on the squirrel, which had paused on a branch just out of reach.

"Almost there." Sandstorm called from below.

Shadowpaw reached out a paw, stretching as far as he could. Just as he thought he had it, the squirrel darted away, out of reach.

"Keep going!" Sandstorm urged.

Shadowpaw didn't think he had any more energy left, but he gritted his teeth and pushed on. With a final leap, he grabbed onto the branch and scooped up the squirrel. He scrambled down the tree and landed on the ground, triumphant. Sandstorm was grinning from ear to ear.

"Well done," She said. "You'll make a great hunter someday."

Shadowpaw beamed with pride. He knew that he still had a lot to learn, but with Sandstorm by his side, he was ready to face any challenge that came his way.

As Sandstorm and Shadowpaw continued on their hunting, they caught a familiar scent on the breeze. Sandstorm's ears pricked up, and she signaled for Shadowpaw to follow her.

As they crept closer, they heard the sound of voices in the distance. They carefully made their way towards the noise, staying hidden in the bushes and trees. They got closer and saw a group of ShadowClan warriors gathered around a large tom with tabby fur and long talons. Sandstorm's heart skipped a beat as she recognized him as Tigerclaw, the former ThunderClan deputy who had been exiled moons ago for his treacherous ways.

But as they listened to his words, their shock turned to horror. Tigerclaw was no longer a rogue or an exile; he was now the leader of ShadowClan, and he was calling for the other Clans to join him in conquering the forest.

Shadowpaw felt a chill run down her spine. He knew that Tigerclaw was ruthless and cunning, and with the power of a Clan behind him, he could be even more dangerous than ever before.

"Come on," She whispered to Shadowpaw. "We need to get back to ThunderClan and warn them of what's happening."

Shadowpaw nodded, his eyes wide with fear and excitement. As Sandstorm and Shadowpaw arrived back in ThunderClan territory, they immediately sought out Fireheart. They found him near the entrance to the camp, and Sandstorm quickly relayed what they had seen and heard in ShadowClan territory.

"Tigerclaw is back," She said, her voice low and urgent. "And he's the leader of ShadowClan now. He was talking to a patrol about taking over all four Clans."

Fireheart's eyes widened in disbelief and horror. He had always feared of him coming back, but not like this. "We have to warn the other Clans. We can't let him succeed in his plan." He meowed, trying to sound confident.

Sandstorm nodded in agreement. "I'll go with you," She mewed. "We'll make sure that the other Clans know what's going on."

Fireheart nodded, his expression grim. "We'll leave immediately."

Sandstorm turned to Shadowpaw. "Stay here and let Waterlily know what has happened. She will find a way to tell Bluestar."

She then raced off to gather the other ThunderClan warriors, while Fireheart began to make his way towards Fourtrees. Shadowpaw stood in horror, not wanting to move. If Tigerclaw was really leader of ShadowClan, they were in for some dangerous times. He shook as if to clear it, then bounded towards Waterlily. She was tidying up the medicine den and she tucked away some moss in the corner behind the small pool.

"Waterlily." He mewed softly.

Waterlily looked up in alarm and could feel his fear as he said her name. "What's wrong?"

"Tigerclaw is back. We believe he is leader of ShadowClan. He might be trying to overrule the other Clans. Fireheart and Sandstorm are on their way to warn the other Clans."

Waterlily widened her eyes. "Tigerclaw is back?" She repeated hoarsely.

"Yellowfang, Tigerclaw is..." She turned her head, then remembered that Yellowfang was dead. Her eyes clouded with sadness and she laid back her ears on her head. "I will let Bluestar know when I believe she is ready to know. For now, we must let Fireheart handle this."

Shadowpaw tensed. "Won't she find out?"

"Perhaps."

Shadowpaw tilted his head to the side. "What will you do then?"

"If she finds out?" She paused, waiting for his nod. She then continued. "I would have to tell her. She is still our leader, but she has to be at the right mindset to deal with stuff like this. She is in no state of mind to think about Tigerclaw coming back."

Shadowpaw nodded his head then padded away to the apprentices' den. As he laid down to sleep for a bit, he began thinking of what all Waterlily told him. Tigerclaw murdered innocent cats. Who knows how many more cats he has killed by now.

Chapter Twenty One

Waterlily had been busy preparing for the upcoming Gathering. She had gathered all the herbs she needed to replenish the Clan's medicine supply, and had made sure that all of her patients were well taken care of. But despite her preparations, Waterlily couldn't shake off the feeling of unease that had settled in the pit of her stomach. She missed her mentor and friend, Yellowfang, who had passed away only what felt like moments ago. Without her guidance and wisdom, Waterlily felt lost and unsure of herself.

Waterlily sat down outside the medicine den, feeling a wave of anxiety wash over her. She couldn't help but wonder if she was doing enough for her Clan. She felt behind on everything she did. She took a deep breath, trying to calm herself down. She knew that she needed to be strong for her Clan, especially during the Gathering, which was a time of great importance and significance. She reminded herself of the many cats in her Clan who relied on her for their health and wellbeing.

Taking another deep breath, Waterlily puffed out her chest and made her way towards the clearing.

"Bluestar won't be going to the Gathering again." Mewed Fireheart. "So I'll be taking her place again. He paused and glanced around the clearing. "Mousefur, Sandstorm, Darkstripe, Cloudpaw and Ashpaw. You'll be going to the Gathering. The rest of you stay here."

"What if Tigerclaw comes and attacks us while at the Gathering?" Protested Darkstripe.

"Tigerclaw knows there's a Gathering tonight." Added Longtail.

"We can't afford to leave more cats behind than usual. If we appear weak at the Gathering, we risk inviting attack from all the Clans." Fireheart insisted, his eyes slightly narrowing.

"And all the Clans know of the fire. We can't let them know we are

weak." Mewed Willowpelt, taking a pace forward.

With a slight nod, Fireheart flicked his tail and the cats were off, heading towards Fourtrees. As Waterlily followed Fireheart and the rest of her clanmates, she felt a sense of determination and purpose settle over her. She knew that she had a job to do, and that she couldn't let her anxiety and self-doubt get in the way.

As she arrived at the Gathering place, Waterlily was greeted by the other Clan cats, who welcomed her warmly. She took her place among the other medicine cats, feeling proud and honored to represent her Clan. But then a pang of pain washed over her as Runningnose padded over to them. His nose was crusted and dry.

"How is everyone from the fire?"

Waterlily lowered her head in shame. She couldn't meet Runningnose's eyes. She had witnessed the tragic death of Yellowfang. As she spoke to Runningnose, Waterlily could see the shock and sadness in his eyes. She began to recount the events that had led to Yellowfang's demise.

"It happened during the fire that swept through our camp," She explained. "Yellowfang had been helping to find the elders when she got trapped in the flames. Despite our best efforts, we were unable to reach her in time."

Runningnose bowed his head in mourning. "Yellowfang had been a respected and beloved medicine cat of ShadowClan before she had left to join ThunderClan."

Waterlily continued, her voice heavy with emotion. "She was a great medicine cat and an even greater friend. She will be sorely missed by all of us in ThunderClan, and I know that she will be missed by you and your Clan as well."

Runningnose nodded solemnly. "Her memory will live on in the hearts of all who knew her."

With that, Waterlily and Runningnose shared a moment of silence in honor of Yellowfang's memory. Though she was gone, they knew

that her legacy would live on, inspiring generations of cats to come. Mudfur and Barkface joined in the silence and bowed their head as well.

A familiar scent then rose into Waterlily's nose. It almost burned her nostrils. She then widened her eyes as she recognized the tom that leaped up onto the high branch. A big dark brown tabby tom with long talons stood proud, looking over all the Clans as all eyes faced him. Tigerclaw! It was really him.

"Why is Tigerclaw up there?" Mewed Mousefur. She was sitting a few tail-lengths from Waterlily.

Waterlily padded over to her and gulped. "I believe he is leader of ShadowClan." She whispered, hoping Tigerclaw didn't hear.

"It is true. I am leader of ShadowClan." His voice was deep but rang out. "I am now, Tigerstar." His eyes were narrowed and his gaze stopped on Fireheart.

Waterlily took a small pace backwards, shaking her head. *No... No. He can't be.*

"Let the meeting begin." Meowed Crookedstar. His light colored fur glittered in the moonlight from the gloss of water droplets. A drop of water rolled down from his whiskers as he licked his crooked jaw. "RiverClan has plenty of what is needed." He began. "We gave shelter to ThunderClan from the fire."

Waterlily rose to her paws and narrowed her eyes. She dug her claws into the soft earth, to keep her steady, but she longed to claw out his ears. She could feel Fireheart rumbling out a low growl in his throat.

Crookedstar then continued, "Other than that, nothing else to report." He dipped his head then sat back down.

Tallstar got to his paws and stood tall on his long limbs. "WindClan is also doing well. Not much to report on our end."

Fireheart hesitated to go next. He was just as curious as the rest of his Clan on what Tigerstar had to say. Luckily, Tigerstar took a few

steps forward and puffed out his chest as he spoke. "I stand here before you by the will of StarClan. Nightstar was a noble warrior, but he was old, and he did not have the strength to fight the sickness when it came. His deputy, Cinderfur, died too."

Waterlily glanced worriedly at Runningnose. "Why didn't you mention Nightstar and Cinderfur?" She softly whispered in his ear.

Runningnose dipped his head. "Yellowfang was a close friend. You needed your peace." He whispered back, not taking his eyes off Tigerstar.

Waterlily looked back up at Tigerstar and kept silent as he continued.

"StarClan brought me to ShadowClan when its need was greatest," Tigerstar continued from on top of the Great Rock. "Not enough cats survived the sickness to hunt for the nursing queens and the elders, or to defend their clan, and no warrior was ready to take on the leadership. Then StarClan sent an omen to Runningnose that another great leader would arise. I swear by all our warrior ancestors that I will become that leader."

Runningnose shuffled his paws uncomfortably and looked down at his paws. Waterlily placed her plump tail gently on his shoulder and shared his grief. She then noticed a bit of regret energizing from his body and she wondered if Tigerstar had threatened him to become leader of ShadowClan.